

Soul Survivor

THE SOUL MUSIC MAGAZINE NUMBER 6
WINTER 1986/87 \$3.00 (£2 U.K.)

**INCLUDED IN
THIS ISSUE:**
Interviews with
**BOBBY BLAND
& SYLVIA MOY**



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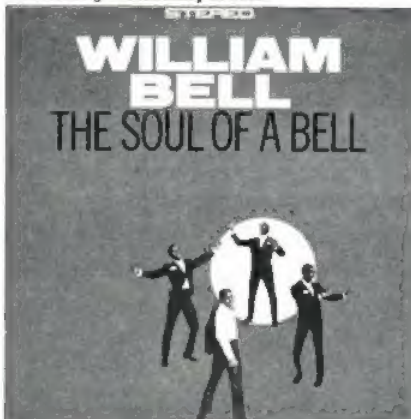
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to issue #6 of North America's only Soul music magazine. We would like to thank our readers for their continued support and apologize for the magazine's erratic frequency. Owing to the considerable pressures of producing a publication that conforms to our high standards, we have found it necessary to limit our frequency to three issues per year. The reader will recall that **Soul Survivor** is written and produced by Soul enthusiasts who donate their time and efforts freely during their spare time. We have received many inquiries regarding the availability of the magazine in certain areas. You can help us here by encouraging your local record or book store to stock **Soul Survivor**. Details are available from the normal address.

A welcome this issue goes out to new contributor David Bianco. Bianco has a forthcoming book on Motown to be published by Pierian Press in 1987, titled, **Heatwave: The Motown Fact Book**. It will include complete discographies, profiles of Motown groups, artists, producers and songwriters. For more information contact Thomas Schiltheiss c/o The Pierian Press, P.O. Box. 1808, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, USA.

A worthwhile venture you should be aware of is the Otis Redding Memorial Fund which intends to erect a memorial to Otis along the banks of Lake Monona in Madison, Wisconsin. Lake Monona was the site of the 1967 plane crash in which Otis lost his life. To raise funds for the memorial which is planned for the twentieth anniversary of Otis's death, 1987, they are selling reproductions of the poster used to advertise his ill-fated Madison concert on the day of his death. The poster, which measures 16 x 22 inches, is for sale at a price of \$16 each (U.S. funds) including airmail postage and handling costs. Contributions should be payable to "The Otis Redding Memorial Fund" and should be sent in care of Z-104 Radio, Postage Office Box 8030, Madison, WI. 53708, USA.

While on the subject of Otis Redding, we have news of a second 30 Greatest Hits package from WEA of Canada. Compiled by Kim Cooke, the remastered double album will include Otis Redding's previously unissued version of *You Left The Water Running*. Originally issued by Otis protégé Billy Young on Chess Records in 1966, it was later issued by both Maurice & Mac and Barbara Lynn. Other hard to get Otis records included in the package will be both sides of his Xmas single and *Don't Drop Out*, from the 1967 *Stay In School* Stax promotional album.

Finally, a mention about our readers' information service: send us your Soul-related questions, no matter how obscure, and we will do our best to answer them. You are also welcome to send us any additions to discographies or label listings or suggestions for future articles. It's your page — use it!

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BOBBY BLUE BLAND



I've always liked Bobby "Blue" Bland's music since the first time I heard *Turn On Your Lovelight*, over WLAC in the early sixties. It is a well arranged brassy blues with a screaming but soulful vocal. The song sent me running off to my local record shop with the name Bobby "Blue" Bland on my lips. I now have over sixty singles and numerous albums in my collection and I wouldn't part with too many of them.

Robert Calvin Bland was born on January 30th 1930. He made records initially for the Modern label but the bulk of his platters were cut for Duke over a twenty year span. He then recorded for ABC/Dunhill which was followed by MCA. Finally free of all his obligations to past contracts Bobby was able to sign last year with the company of his choice. He chose Jackson's Malaco Records and the subsequent record, *Members Only* is dynamite.

Bobby Bland played Toronto's Colonial Tavern at least once a year through the late sixties and early seventies. His records were getting airplay here and people would jam the bar. However, in November 1977 the revue played another club, The El Mocambo and unfortunately, very few people turned out. That was the last time Toronto was to see Bobby Bland along with Mel Jackson and the Mellow Fellows until this last summer when they played the Molson Lite Blues and Soul Weekend. Bobby was right on the money but the weather wasn't. He was rained out after five songs but that was enough to see that he still could sing as well as ever.

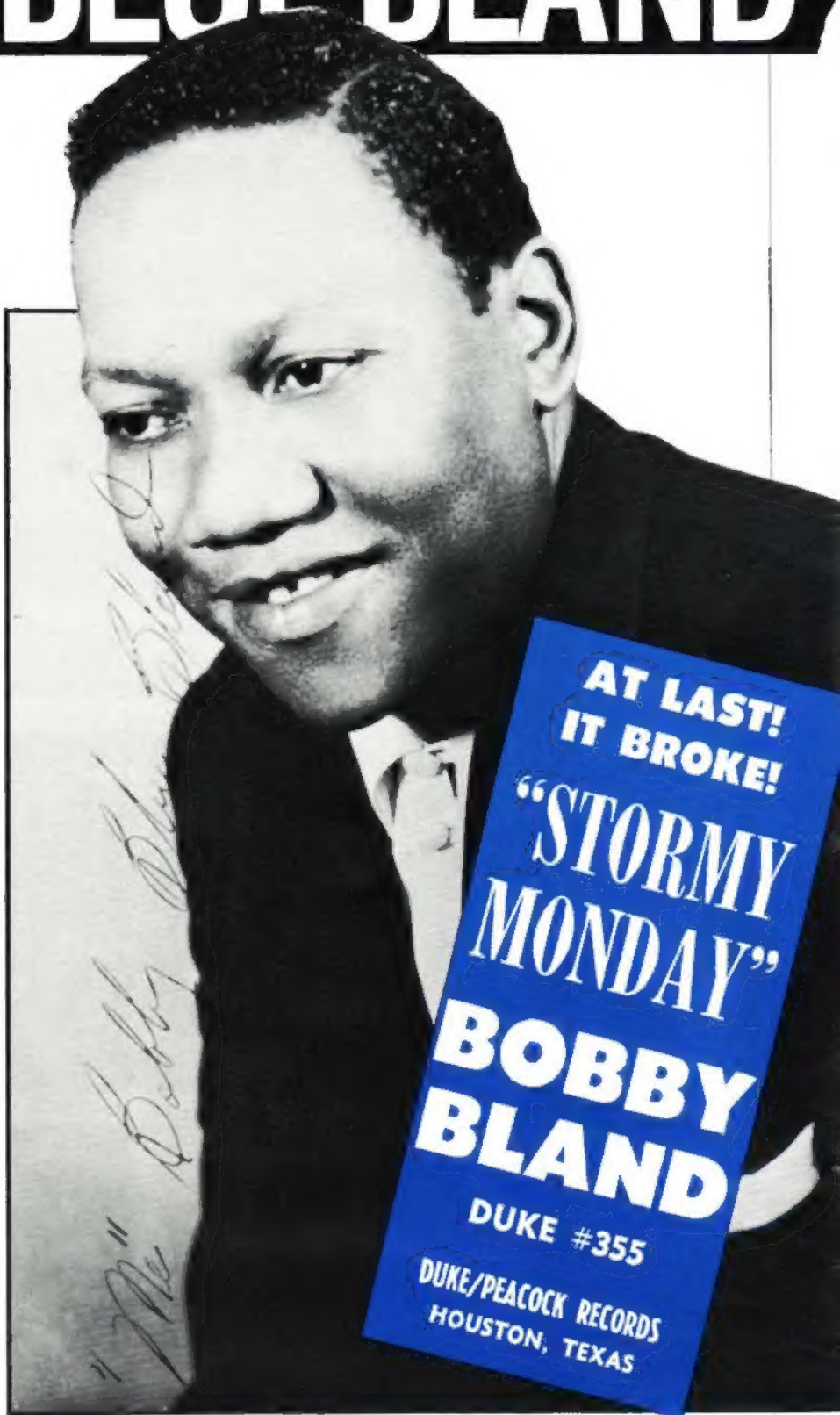
What follows is a distillation of several interviews which I have done with Bobby backstage, here in Canada and in the U.S.A. He was always very tolerant and gracious to my many questions. I realize this is not the complete Bobby Bland story but it will give you an insight into the man behind all those wonderful, timeless records.

WELCOME TO CANADA BOBBY. AFTER LISTENING TO YOUR RECORDS FOR MANY YEARS IT'S A TREAT TO FINALLY MEET YOU. LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING. WILL YOU TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD? WERE YOU BROUGHT UP IN THE CITY OR IN THE COUNTRY?

I'm a farm person from outside of Memphis, about 40 miles northeast of Memphis, a place called Rosemark, Tennessee. I was brought up on the farm, picking cotton, chopping cotton, shelling corn, whatever. So it wasn't a city life.

BOBBY, DID YOU HEAR A LOT OF COUNTRY MUSIC WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP? WERE THERE INFLUENCES THERE FROM THE GRAND OLE OPRY?

Yeah, yeah there was a lot of that because that's the first thing I really started listening to, like Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams, yeah, Roy Acuff, and there used to be a singer, called himself Gene Steele. I don't know if you ever heard of him but he used to



First promo shot. The 3B Boy.

do something like a ballad-type thing; you would say something similar to a Perry Como, but it was kind of country and western-like, and that was on (the radio) at 8:30 in the morning. I used to listen to that. Country and western was basically what I

really wanted to do, in a sense, because I knew the lyrics, I knew the flavour of western tunes very well. When we moved to Memphis, that's when I got a different variety. I started listening to Blind Lemon, Pee Wee Crayton, Big Boy Crudup,

all of that.

HOW OLD WERE YOU THEN?

I think I was round about 11 or something like that, maybe. Yeah, somewhere in that area. I started out from the grocery store to Bender's Garage. I parked cars for about a little better than seven years. I always wanted to sing, and Andrew Mitchell would always have an amateur show up over the Pantaze Drugstore on Beale and Hernando. That's where we kind of muddled around. Everybody'd meet and have a few beers or what have you, and see what everybody had to offer.

Then I started out with Rosco Gordon. I began driving for him and he started letting me go on stage and do a couple of tunes. The only one that I knew was by Joe Turner: *I Got A Girl That Live Up On The Hill*. So that was my opening tune. Then I ventured over from that to Roy Brown's *Rocks Is My Pillow*, *Cold Ground Is My Bed*, whatever. That was when I really liked Roy's style quite a lot. Then Lowell Fulson's songs and it just started from that day, you know.

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE TO DO FOR ROSCO GORDON?

Well, nothing that much. No more than drive and watch him, keep him from gambling so much, you know, because he loved the dice during that time. He was a good gambler, I know that. I think he loved that much more than he did his career actually, because he did quite a bit of it. But as a person, he was very nice.

DID HE HAVE A HIT RECORD AT THAT TIME?

Rosco had quite a few hits: *No More Doggin'*, and *I Saddled the Cow and Milked the Horse*. He was the first hottest thing we had out of Memphis during that time. B.B. King was doing broadcasts for Pepikon then, you know, at WDIA, about 15 minutes live on Saturdays. They were about the hottest, Rosco and B.B., but I loved B.B.'s sound better, you know, his feeling. Rosco didn't have anything but a shuffle 'cause that was the thing then, you know. But I really liked B.'s approach to the blues, because that was my feeling too.

HOW DID YOU GET TO MEET B.B. KING, BOBBY?

Just wherever his car was parked, that's where I would be, just to get to be with him — and B. has never changed, though, from the time that I met him. He's always been this easy-going guy who will do anybody a favour, regardless what you look like or what you're doing. He had quite a few people hanging around him, but he kind of took me under his wings, and I listened to him a lot.

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE TO DO AS A VALET DRIVER?

Well, a number of things, you know. We'd run little errands, we'd set up the bandstand, we'd go to the cleaners, we'd drive, whatever had to be done.

AND HOW MUCH MONEY DID YOU MAKE?

Oh, let me see, not very much, you know. I think I got my biggest money when Junior Parker and I got together. That was \$30 a night.

BOTH ROSCO GORDON AND JUNIOR PARKER RECORDED FOR THE MEMPHIS SUN LABEL. I'M SURPRISED YOU DIDN'T CUT A SESSION THERE.

I actually recorded a tune with Rosco Gordon at Sun, like a duet, together. That was the first time in a studio really. I was told that my voice wasn't proper for recording during that time, so I just took them at their word. I didn't believe that it would be a good idea to go into the studio after I had been told that, so I didn't try again for a while.

WAS IT THEN THAT THE OWNERS OF THE LOS ANGELES-BASED MODERN LABEL, THE BIHARI BROTHERS, APPROACHED YOU TO CUT A RECORD? Yeah. That was under the heading of Ike Turner. Him and guitarist M.T. Murphy were together then. They had a little group. They got me together with the Bihari brothers. Ike always thought I could sing so I have him to thank today for giving me the shot with Modern records.

I CAME ACROSS AN ALBUM AND IT HAS A COUPLE OF TRACKS ON IT BY YOU: *DRIFTING FROM TOWN TO TOWN* AND *LOVE YOU, YES I DO*. CAN YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THEM?

Well, I guess the Bihari brothers did this. It's one of my first recordings, *Drifting From Town To Town*. I was with their Modern label then.

IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE YOU DO NOW.

No, I know it wouldn't. That's from '52, I think it was, '51, something like that. I was really new in the business. I didn't really know anything about recording. I think Ike Turner did this arrangement. This was done in Tuff Green's house, you know. So I was really new in the business. I know it doesn't sound like me — I'd like to hear it.

DO YOU REMEMBER WHO WOULD BE ON THE SESSION?

Let me see, I think (sings) *Driftin' From Town To Town*, M.T. Murphy, I think, which lives in Chicago. Like I said, Ike Turner played piano on it at that time, Billy Duncan on tenor saxophone and Earl Forrest, that's right, on drums. Yeah, that's who that was.

HOW OLD WERE YOU THEN?

Let me see, '51, about 21, I think it was, something like that.

WAS *DRIFTING FROM TOWN TO TOWN* YOUR FIRST RECORD?

No, it's not my very first. *Army Blues* actually was one of my first. Me and, God bless him, Billy Duncan, did the session and Earl Forrest engineered.

NO BLOW NO SHOW IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT. THAT'S GREAT, I LOVE THAT ONE.

Thank you. That came from Earl Forrest also, I think. I don't know if he got credit for it or what have you, but he engineered that session also. Earl Forrest had a record out in the '50s called *Whoopin' and Hollerin'*. He was a good drummer and he had the band during that time. Him and Billy Duncan had joined together and I was the vocal for the group, you know.

SO THAT FIRST RECORD WAS THE *ARMY BLUES*.

Well, I'd cut *Army Blues* before I got with Don Robey. That was during the time David James Mattis had the label there in Memphis. That's when I went into the army in '52. I went in service for two years, about six months, 29 days, what-

ever. I got out of service and I was at my mother's restaurant and I got a call from Don Robey. He had bought the label from David James Mattis out of Memphis, who was the manager of WDIA during that time. So the label started there, the Memphis Duke label, Robey said, "You Bobby Bland?" I said, "Yeah". He said, "Well I'm Don Robey and you're on my label and now it's time for you to record." So, man, when he said that, wow, that was the biggest thing I'd ever heard in my life, somebody called me and say, you know. So he sent me thirteen dollars and eighty cents to get a bus from Memphis to Houston. 1955, I think it was. So here I am.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE FIRST TUNES YOU RECORDED FOR DON ROBEY WHEN YOU GOT TO HOUSTON?

My first recordings were *It's My Life Baby*, *Time Out* and *I Smell Trouble*. *Two Steps From the Blues* was done in '55. My first big record was in '57. *Further On Up the Road* was the biggest thing, and then we kind of moved on after that and then we got with Joe Scott. I had about 14, I think, in a row. I think Johnny Ace was the first to do that. I was next with Duke label.

AND YOUR TRAVELLING SHOW BECAME LARGER AND LARGER.

Yeah.

IT BECAME CALLED BLUES CONSOLIDATED.

Right, right.

YOU AND LITTLE JUNIOR PARKER.

Well, it was Junior Parker's revue during the time that I was with him and so I just used the review part after I got on my own — and I didn't go on my own until '60.

OH, SO YOU WOULD BE A PRELIMINARY TO JUNIOR PARKER ON HIS SHOW. WOULD YOU GO ON FIRST?

Right, right, I opened the show. I was driving and handling the instruments and everything during that time.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD BE ON THE CONSOLIDATED REVUE?

Well it was just a band, Junior and myself during that particular time, then after that I got on my own. I had the Bland Dolls and about a twelve-piece band.

TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT JUNIOR PARKER.

Well, a very lovely person. Junior gave me a lot of pointers, you know, about the business, and I had a lovely eight years with him.

YEAH, IT'S A GREAT PITY THAT NOTHING COULD BE DONE ABOUT HIS ILLNESS AND THAT HE DIED AFTER SEVERAL OPERATIONS ON A CYST OF THE BRAIN IN LATE 1971.

Actually, Junior ate a little too much, and it really caused this particular thing. He was kind of a type of person that would worry about the least thing. But his music, he was really wrapped up in it, and that's the reason why I liked him. I would be goofing off sometimes and I had a session coming up and Junior would always keep right on my back about it and then get in there and get my lyrics together with me.

MOST OF YOUR DUKE RECORDINGS WERE WRITTEN BY DEADRIC MALONE. WAS THAT A PSEUDONYM FOR DON ROBEY?

Yeah, that's true.

SO HE ACTUALLY MADE QUITE A BIT OF MONEY FROM THE PUBLISHING RIGHTS. Right.

DID HE WRITE THE SONGS OR DID YOU WRITE THE SONGS?

No, I never did any writing. See, Houston was quite a big town for lyric writers. And so, by Robey being the only black in that field, well he had first preference to all the lyrics that mostly the coloured kids would write, you know; so some of the guys would come through there. Take for instance Joe Medwick. He did quite a bit of material for me, you know, when I first got my first hit, *Further On Up the Road* and *Don't Cry No More, Sometime Tomorrow*. Those things like that and he sold those for about \$15 apiece.

AND, LIKE, ROBEY WOULD PUT... Robey, right.

BOBBY, HOW WOULD YOU SUM UP YOUR TYPE OF BLUES?

Well, Dave, actually, I guess I'd put it like this. I had quite a few idols, you know, and through my coming up, and B. was the first in the blues field; and then after that I started listening to Nat King Cole and Perry Como and Tony Bennett. It gave me the softness, you know, that, say for instance, like the tune *I'll Take Care of You*. Well, I kind of took some of the phrases that I would listen from the other artists and make it into a blues ballad, not a really harsh blues like I was doing before, like in '55; that was just straight gut-bucket blues. I wanted to have a little something different. So I guess, I don't know how you'd really sum it up, Dave, but I used to have a real high falsetto, and I had my tonsils removed and so it made it a little heavier. It lowered my voice so that's why the squall come in it.

AND QUITE A FEW PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN IT FROM YOU. DAVID CLAYTON THOMAS FOR ONE. (Laughs) Yeah, and Little Milton.

YEAH, HE COPIED YOU VERY VERY CLOSELY. Yeah, very good.

BUT YOU DON'T MIND THAT AT ALL.

No, no, no, I think it's very beautiful. We have to start with somebody, you know, and B. was my little crutch. He didn't mind, so I don't mind either.

MANY OF THE CHICAGO BLUES PEOPLE, OF COURSE, ARE FROM YOUR AREA, AND THEIR ROOTS ARE IN PEOPLE LIKE ROBERT JOHNSON AND MUDDY WATERS. BUT YOU'RE NOT. ALTHOUGH YOU KNOW OF THEM, YOU'RE MORE INTO A SORT OF SMOOTH SOUND.

Yeah, I like the smoother sound, but I do know about the gut-bucket blues, though. I started out, listening to Blind Lemon, Bessie Smith, you know, all of those people.

HOW ABOUT TEXAS BLUESMEN LIKE T-BONE WALKER?

Well, that's my boy, T-Bone. I really loved him, yeah. I worked with his tune, *Stormy Monday* for a good many years before I would attempt to do anything with it because he did such a beautiful job on it. You had to work at these tunes if you were going to do them. I would say it's more or less a standard blues, and so those type tunes you just don't run in and cut them, you know, that's the way I feel, you have to work with them.



STORMY MONDAY BLUES WAS A SMASH RECORD FOR YOU IN 1962. WAS IT YOUR IDEA TO RECORD THE TUNE?

I brought the idea to Robey. It wasn't supposed to go on a record. It was after the session in Nashville at Bradley Studio, and so I said, "Mr. Robey, there's a tune that I've been wanting to cut a long time. How much will it cost?" He said, "Well, do you have it already together?" I said, "Yeah." And me and Wayne and Hamp Simmons and Joe Jabbo; Joe Scott had already talked about doing it. We used to do it on stage anyway. So he said, "Well, what the hell. Go ahead and put it on wax,"

and I said, "Well, whatever the cost, it's just for my personal use." So, we finished, and he said, "That's your next release." That's how it came about.

OF ALL THE RECORDS THAT YOU'VE DONE, BOBBY, ALL THE ALBUMS, **HERE'S THE MAN**, I THINK, PROBABLY HAS BEEN THE MOST POPULAR OF ALL OF THEM. IT HAS ALL THOSE GREAT SONGS ON THERE: *TURN ON YOUR LOVE LIGHT*, *JELLY JELLY*, *STORMY MONDAY BLUES*.

You know, Dave, you know, you'd be surprised — one of my biggest records is **Two Steps From the Blues**. That's the biggest LP I've ever had. **Here's the Man** was the second LP that I still get requests from to do onstage, you know, now. But I have to do **Two Steps From the Blues**, **I Just Got To Forget You**, which that LP still sells, and this one, too. I would say they were two of the biggest LP's I've ever had.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT A LOT OF TIME AND THOUGHT WERE PUT INTO THE ARRANGEMENTS ON THOSE EARLY DUKE SIDES. WAS THAT JOE SCOTT'S IDEA?

Yeah, well Joe is the one that taught me my time and different keys, and what have you, yeah.

DID HE USED TO TRAVEL WITH YOU?

Yeah, he was out on the road for about four years.

CAN YOU TELL ME SOME OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH YOUR BAND?

Well, quite a few. I've had about three bands since I started. The first one was with Joe Fritz. He was with the first band that went out in '55, '56, '57, and then later, who did we have? Mr. Jackson, which you see here, Melvin Jackson, that was partly Joe Scott's band anyway, but Melvin was handling it actually. Then Joe went out on the road and that was the end of it. But we had some real good people to come through that band like Bobby Forte, which we used to call Youngblood; he's with B.B. King now. A fella that started with Joe Fritz called Jimmy Johnson which is passed now, was a tenor player. Robert Skinner, Ray Field which is the baritone player. Johnny Brown which was my first guitar player and then after that was Clance Holliman. Hamp Simmons which is the bass player, stayed there about ten years and the greatest guitar player of all times in my book is Wayne Bennett. He was there about eight or nine years.

A LOT OF SOUTHERN BLUESMEN MOVED NORTH TO CHICAGO BUT YOU DIDN'T DID YOU?

No, I didn't. I was in Memphis and then we went to Texas. I went to Houston in '55, and I didn't get around to Chicago until, what year? I didn't get into Chicago until the '60s actually, you know. We, Junior and I didn't play it that often. I think I played it once. This was at, well, in Gary, actually. We played Gary, not Chicago. And we didn't get a chance to get into Chicago that often.

WELL THEY OBVIOUSLY MUST LIKE YOU IN TEXAS. I tell you, a lot of people think I'm from Texas, you know, and not from Memphis or Rosemark or what have you. They kind of just took me in in Houston and say I was one of them, so I enjoy that and actually I get a better turnout in Texas than I do in Tennessee and that's my home.

THE CLUBS THERE DON'T START 'TIL LATE, DO THEY?

Well, it's from about 10 'til 2.

BUT SOMETIMES YOU'LL BE PLAYING 'TIL 4 IN THE MORNING.

Well, that's a lot of places when they give the breakfast dances and what have you.

TELL ME ABOUT THAT.

Well, it started more or less like on the West Coast, Basin Street. We have a thing starting around 3 o'clock in the morning which would go to around 5 or 6 in the morning. But if you enjoy your work, it doesn't really matter about the hours, you know, and I dig breakfast dances myself.

WELL WHERE DO THE PEOPLE COME FROM? ANOTHER CLUB? OR DO THEY FINISH WORK AT MIDNIGHT AND THEN GO TO THIS OR WHAT?

Well a lot of people don't get out until around midnight and the clubs stay open for this particular thing, and there are people that just be up, you know, around that time and can't really sleep. So they just go out and have breakfast and what have you, and catch a show.

YOU HAD A BIG HIT IN LATE 1961 WITH *TURN ON YOUR LOVE LIGHT*. HOW DID YOU COME ACROSS THAT TUNE?

Joe Scott, the man that's responsible for my career. He wrote it. Joe did a lot of things, you know, he'd get some lyrics and if the story wasn't really up to par, Joe would change them around to fit me and make it to be a stronger story. Sometime cats they write love letters, you know, and they maybe have one good line and so Joe would have to change the other two lines or whatever, the bridge, whatever. But he did quite a bit of writing, right on the spot, like if we...

DID THAT TUNE COME OFF THE TOP OF HIS HEAD?

Yeah, in Nashville. I don't guess it came off the top. I don't know, I couldn't really say, but when we had finished the session, he said, "I got a little tune, Blue, come out and do this one, just for the hell of it." So this was it. He might have been playing around with it for some time, you know.

WITH THE OLD DUKE SESSIONS, DID YOU JUST CUT THEM LIVE?

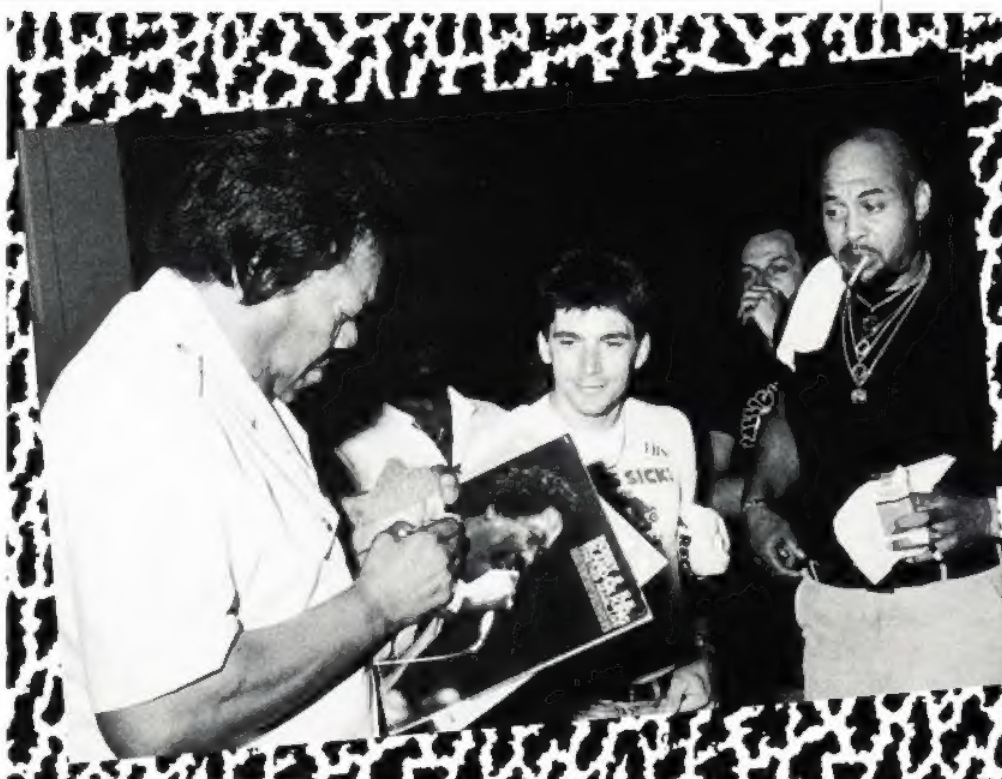
Yeah, usually we did and it was a real good feeling at that particular time because that's the way that I was taught. I like to overdub, really. It's much easier and it's not as much work. You just tire yourself out when you're doing it with the band. I might be moody that day, you know, and you never really click, you take track, track, track after track. And so I think overdubbing is very beautiful.

YOU USE BRASS QUITE A BIT IN YOUR NUMBERS.

Yeah, because basically, well, that's how I started out, you know, with Joe Scott. Joe kind of favoured the brass mostly and it got stuck in my head, so it's kind of hard to do anything like the early years, just with the rhythm section. The brass has to be in there because it helps. It kind of goes with my voice.

YOU WORK OFF THE BRASS, TOO, DON'T YOU?

Yeah, I sure do. That's the click, I guess, Dave.



Bobby Bland signing autographs at the Molson Lite Blues & Soul weekend July 1986.

Every entertainer has a little something that kicks them off, either the guitar, the bass or whatever. The tenor is my thing that I can hear and it gives me a feeling to deliver.

WHO ARE SOME OF YOUR OTHER FAVOURITES, BOBBY? PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS AMAZED WHEN I TELL THEM THAT SOME OF THE WHITE POP SINGERS ARE YOUR FAVOURITES.

Oh yeah, yeah. I would say first of all, Perry Como, Tony Bennett, Andy Williams. Some things that he's doing I can understand, you know, like *Moon River*. Jack Jones, I like some of the stuff that he does and I can't pronounce this guy's name but, Humperdinck or something. Tom Jones has so much, he has a lot of class. I like the way that he sings. And, you know, which my favourite was Nat Cole. That was the one with the velvet voice that everybody tried to imitate and never will.

YOU HAVE STRANGE INSPIRATIONS, DIFFERENT IDOLS THAN MOST PEOPLE WOULD EXPECT YOU TO HAVE, BUT YOU'RE MORE INTO THE SINGING ASPECT, RIGHT?

Right, right. And whatever has a story, a real good feeling, you know. Take the song, *Friday the 13th Child*. What made me relate to it was I thought of Burl Ives, like he'd play the guitar and (sings) *Friday the 13th Child*, Mother Nellie Died in Pain, But She Never Looked Over Your Shoulder, Friends and Family You Never See. I got it something like that, man.

IT JUST STRIKES ME STRANGE THAT YOU SHOULD THINK OF BURL IVES, THAT'S ALL. I'M NOT CUTTING IT, BUT A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULDN'T RELATE TO BURL IVES IN THAT SITUATION.

Well, I watched a lot of movies that he was in and those things kind of touch me. Whatever I can get something from. If you got a story that I can hear, I can get something out of it, so why not? It

doesn't make any difference about what colour you are, you know, not to me it doesn't.

DON ROBEY SOLD THE LABEL AND THEN HE PASSED AWAY JUNE 16, 1975, AM I RIGHT?

Yes. He sold the company to ABC Dunhill. And I think Robey lived about a year, after that.

DID DON ROBEY KNOW HE WAS SICK?

I guess he was the only one that really knew, because Robey never stopped, you know. He went into the hospital a couple of times, in and out, for his stomach or what have you. And he was around seventy — say he was seventy-five or six or something like that, but Robey was still moving around good; I mean doing his normal daily thing that he would do in the office. He died at home on a Sunday, like just watching TV. Yeah.¹

SO YOU PASSED THEN TO ABC DUNHILL AND YOU STARTED REALLY A NEW CAREER FOR YOURSELF. YOU PUT OUT SOME ALBUMS. THEY WERE REALLY WELL ARRANGED AND I BELIEVE THEY SOLD WELL, ESPECIALLY THE CALIFORNIA ALBUM.

Well, that's the only one that sold. Actually, we had little differences about the product, my product, because we didn't have the right promotion.

YOU PUT OUT A COUPLE OF ALBUMS WITH YOUR GOOD FRIEND, B.B. KING LIVE LP'S AND FOR THE FIRST TIME WE DID ACTUALLY HAVE ON RECORD A LIVE BOBBY BLAND SHOW.

Yeah, yeah. Well, it was a thrill for me to do a live thing because, as you know Dave, I've never done a live-type recording on my own. ABC wanted to see what it would do, because, basically, ABC had both artists, so why not? Didn't have to go through anybody else to do this. Mostly, the things that we did was B.'s stuff and some of the old stuff, Percy Mayfield. We just kind of touched on everything

that we could think of, some of the old blues singers, you know, Marv Helfer was the guy that kind of engineered that particular thing, B.B. and myself, **Together For The First Time**. I didn't think too much of when we did it, but I knew that the two artists being together would bring up some kind of curiosity to the public, but the material, I thought, was very very weak, very poor, and of course B. still laughs all the way to the bank. But it did a lot for me and got me into some of the colleges. It's got me through some doors that normally I wouldn't be playing, you know. It's did a lot for me and I enjoyed it.

DID YOU MAKE A LOT OF MONEY OUT OF THE MUSIC BUSINESS?

No, not really. I made some money, yeah, but not a hell of a lot, you know, because the proper things wasn't really presented right and maybe part of my background made it a little shorter or something. I don't know, but, I didn't do too bad. I'm not no millionaire, nothing like that, you know.

YOU'VE HAD OFFERS FROM OTHER COMPANIES,

HAVEN'T YOU?
Yeah.

HOW COME YOU NEVER WENT?

I don't know. Well, Duke was kind of a family thing with me, you know. They worked with me and helped me with a lot of things, so I felt comfortable, and I felt relaxed, and of course everything wasn't really, everything they told me wasn't really right. But, as I got older, I found out, but during that time I felt partial, because they discovered me and got me out here, and so I felt as if I owed them something, you know. In fact, I was happy with Robey for a number of years.

MAYBE IT'S BETTER BECAUSE SOME OF THE BIG COMPANIES HAVE A TENDENCY TO DO A COUPLE OF LP'S AND IF YOU DON'T PRODUCE, BYE.

Yeah, that's true, too. But I don't think that would have been in my case. Not bragging, but something would have to come off, I believe. But, you know, in these changes in the music field, it's a certain amount of grooming that has to be done, to go in the different areas when they present you

with different things, conversations or whatever. But I wished I'd know like I do now.

ARE YOU MARRIED, BOBBY?

Yeah, I've married twice. I'm not married now.⁴ No.

DO YOU THINK IT'S WITH THE RESULT OF YOUR MUSIC THAT YOU BECAME SEPARATED FROM YOUR WIVES.

I think this is it because it's a hard life to any lady to accept that she will see you every three or four months or something like that. You don't get back home maybe twice a year actually. So all the time she has to fly out or what have you. It's kind of hard. Mainly it's my fault because you be so wrapped up in what you're doing, and you're trying to make, what you would say, ends meet. My first marriage, I had given up music, period. I'd just gotten into this thing with Rosco Gordon and then I stopped for a period of a little better than five years and that's including service time. Then I got married again, and with this travelling, it just doesn't work out in married life, unless you have a really understanding person that really knows what you're doing. And accepts your fans and what have you. So I think I'll stay like this until I get ready to quit and I won't ever quit singing until the last day.

YEAH, THAT'S WHAT THE LATE HOWLIN' WOLF TOLD ME WHEN I ASKED HIM, "WHEN DO YOU FEEL YOU MIGHT RETIRE?" HE SAID, "BLUES SINGERS DON'T RETIRE," AND HE PERFORMED RIGHT UP TO THE END.

I'm inclined to agree with him because it's my whole life, singing is, music and what have you. It's the only way I have to let off steam a lot of times.

WELL BOBBY, I THANK YOU VERY MUCH AND I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST.

Sure Dave, and it's so nice for you to take out time to come up here. ■

FOOTNOTES

¹*In the liner notes to the Malaco LP Jeff Hannusch claims that Bland's real name is Robert Calvin Brooks and that his date of birth is January 27th, 1930.

²*Robey sold his record and publishing interests to ABC Dunhill in May 1973 for a reported 1 million dollars.

³**Don Robey was 71 when he died from a sudden heart attack.

⁴Bobby Bland has since re-married.

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Bobby Bland & Daddy Cool onstage at the Molson Lite Blues & Soul weekend July 1986.

Photo: D.A. Hill

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THE TEMPTATIONS

By David Bianca

The Temptations may have celebrated their 25th anniversary in 1986, but this outstanding vocal group can trace its roots to two 1950's groups, the Distant's and the Primes. Throughout their 25-year career (and still going strong), the Temptations have not only changed personnel many times, they have also changed their style to adapt to current trends and fashions. They've accomplished this without sacrificing any artistic integrity, and some of their work must be considered trend-setting.

Many of the style changes to be found in listening to the Temptations' recordings over the past 25 years are due to working with new material, new songwriters, and new producers. These behind-the-scenes individuals, so to speak, have influenced the way the Temptations have sounded as much as the identities of the individual singers. It is to the group's credit that they have turned the loss of key individuals to their advantage, eventually finding and recording material suitable to the new voices that have come and gone throughout the years.

THE EARLY DAYS

The Temptations were formed in 1961 by former members of the Distant's and the Primes. The Primes were a Birmingham, Alabama-based group that included Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams, and others. The Distant's were based in Detroit and were also known as Otis Williams and the Distant's. The group consisted of Otis Williams, Melvin Franklin, Elbridge "Al" Bryant, Richard Street, and James Crawford (later replaced by Albert Harold).

The Distant's were active as a group from 1956 until 1960, releasing two singles on Warwick in 1959, *Always/Come On* (Warwick 546) and *Open Up Your Heart/Always* (Warwick 577).

Richard Street, who would rejoin the Temptations in 1971, and James Crawford left the Distant's in 1960, paving the way for the formation of the Temptations in 1961. At first, the new group (Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams, Otis Williams, Melvin Franklin, and Al Bryant) was known as the Elgins, but by the time of their first release on Berry Gordy's Miracle label in 1961, the group was known as the Temptations.

Berry produced two singles by the Temptations on the Miracle label in 1961. The group's heavy roots in gospel-based harmonies is revealed on these early sides, as is their apparent inability to come up with an appropriate rhythmic feeling. This would come later, when they started working



with Smokey Robinson, as would the hits.

Berry Gordy launched his Gordy label in 1962, and the label's first release was by the Temptations, *Dream Come True/Isn't She Pretty* (Gordy 7001). Their second release on Gordy, *Paradise/Slow Down Heart* (Gordy 7010), offered one song written and produced by Berry Gordy (*Paradise*), and the other written and produced by Smokey Robinson (*Slow Down Heart*). This seemingly two-faced disc foreshadows the group's work with Smokey and perhaps indicates that Berry realized he wasn't getting the most out of the group with his own songs and production work.

THEIR FIRST NATIONAL HIT

It would be another year and a few releases later (including the Robinson-penned *I Want a Love I Can See* b/w the Robinson-Whitfield collaboration *The Further You Look, The Less You See* on Gordy 7015) until the Temptations broke nationally with Smokey's composition, *The Way You Do the Things You Do* (Gordy 7028). Featuring Eddie Kendricks on lead, the record is the group's first with David Ruffin replacing Al Bryant (now deceased). David and Eddie would continue to share lead vocals until 1968, when David left for a solo career. David and Eddie are currently touring

and recording together, recreating their hits from the 1963-1968 era.

Smokey continued to pen the hits for the Temptations through 1966. *My Girl* (co-written with the Miracles' Ronnie White), *It's Growing* (co-written with the Miracles' Warren "Pete" Moore), *Since I Lost My Baby* (also with Warren Moore), and *Get Ready* all reached the Top 30 on the pop charts. *My Girl* went all the way to #1 at the beginning of 1965, staying on the charts for some 13 weeks.

NEW SONGWRITERS & PRODUCERS

Get Ready perhaps didn't do as well as Motown management wanted, as they probably were looking for some more top ten material for the Temptations, who had demonstrated their ability to crossover to the white record-buying public. *Ain't To Proud To Beg* (Gordy 7054), released in February 1966, marks another change in the behind-the-scenes team which was writing and producing the Temptations' material. Featuring the lead vocals of David Ruffin, the song was written by Eddie Holland and Norman Whitfield.

From 1966 to 1968, these two would go on to write several hits for the Temptations, including *Beauty Is Only Skin Deep* (Gordy 7055), *(I Know) I'm Losing You* (Gordy 7057), *(Loneliness Made Me Realize) It's You That I Need* (Gordy 7065), and *I Wish It Would Rain* (Gordy 7068), the latter with Roger Penzabene. During this period, Eddie Holland, Frank Wilson, and R. Dean Taylor contributed the 1967 hit, *All I Need* (Gordy 7061), and Whitfield, Penzabene, and Cornelius Grant wrote the 1967 follow-up, *You're My Everything* (Gordy 7063).

PSYCHEDELIC SOUL

Eddie Holland's talents as a lyricist led him to cowrite songs with others outside of the Holland-Dozier-Holland team on an occasional basis, but Norman Whitfield would remain with the Temptations into the 1970's and bring them to the forefront of "psychedelic soul." His writing partner was none other than the multi-talented Barrett Strong, a vocalist, pianist, and songwriter at Motown. To most, Barrett Strong is inevitably linked to his 1959 hit, *Money*, a song that was covered by the Beatles.

Leading the Temptations into the chart-breaking territory of "psychedelic soul" was Dennis Edwards, a former Contour, who replaced David Ruffin as lead vocalist with the Temptations until 1977, when the group left Motown and recorded two albums for Atlantic. He rejoined the group when they returned to Motown in late 1979.

Cloud Nine (Gordy 7081) was the first of several Whitfield-Strong compositions to penetrate the "top ten." It was followed by *Run Away Child, Running Wild* (Gordy 7084), the #1 hit *I Can't Get Next to You* (Gordy 7093), *Psychedelic Shack* (Gordy 7096), and *Ball of Confusion (That's What the World Is Today)* (Gordy 7099). Eddie Kendricks and Dennis Edwards can be heard sharing lead vocals on these songs.

The group's next hit would be their last with Eddie Kendricks. Featuring Eddie on lead, it was a beautiful swan song, and *Just My Imagination (Running Away With Me)* (Gordy 7105) reached the number one spot on the pop charts in early 1971. The song was another composition from Barrett Strong and Norman Whitfield. It would

also be the last release with Paul Williams, who had to leave the group on doctor's orders. Paul would die tragically two years later, an apparent suicide in a car parked not more than a few blocks from Motown's old Detroit offices.

This same line-up (Dennis Edwards, Eddie Kendricks, Paul Williams, Otis Williams, Melvin Franklin) can be heard on the four albums the Temptations recorded with the Supremes in 1968-69. Seemingly aimed at an older audience with middle-of-the-road musical tastes, these albums unfortunately include such songs as a Ruffin-less *Ain't to Proud to Beg* and other songs made popular with different singers in the group.

Richard Street, an original Distant and sometime member of the Monitors, rejoined the Temptations in 1971 to replace Paul Williams, and Damon Harris was recruited to fill in for Eddie Kendricks, two tough acts to follow. Having lost Eddie Kendricks and Paul Williams, the group released the fairly popular *Superstar (Remember How You Got Where You Are)* (Gordy 7111) late in 1971. They rebounded with a bang in 1972 with another #1 hit, *Papa Was a Rollin' Stone* (Gordy 7121). Written by Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong, it was Motown's first Grammy winning record (*Rhythm & Blues Song of the Year*). It was followed by the top ten hit *Masterpiece* (Gordy 7126) in early 1973.

For any number of reasons, subsequent Temptations releases didn't generate much excitement. In 1977, they left Motown and signed with Atlantic. They released two albums of disco material — *Hear to Tempt You* (Atlantic SD 19143) in 1977 and *Bare Back* (Atlantic SD 19188) in 1978.

Bare Back was produced by Brian and Eddie Holland, and most of the songs on that album were co-written by the Holland brothers and others. Louis Price replaced Dennis Edwards as lead vocalist for these records.

THE EIGHTIES

The Temptations returned to Motown and Dennis Edwards at the beginning of the decade. Their releases in 1980 and 1981 failed to make any great impact, and the group was probably languishing in the shadow of Motown's best-selling group, the Commodores. In 1982, Rick James, a nephew of Melvin Franklin, helped to organize the Temptations' *Reunion* tour and album. Always an outstanding "live" act, the Temptations made the reunion tour a success. Eddie Kendricks and David Ruffin rejoined the group for this tour; performances included a tribute to Paul Williams. A single featuring Rick James, *Standing On The Top* (Gordy 1616), was released from the album.

Dennis Edwards left the group in 1984 to pursue his own solo career, a step taken by many of the Temptations' lead singers. The current lineup (Ollie Woodson, Ron Tyson, Richard Street, Otis Williams, Melvin Franklin) continues to record and tour, they often appear sharing the bill with the Four Tops, a group whose personnel has remained constant for some 30 years.

Co-written by Ollie Woodson and Otis Williams, the 1984 release *Treat Her Like A Lady* (Gordy 1765) did well, and the group recently appeared on the soundtrack to the motion picture, *A Fine Mess*. As of this writing, they will be co-featured with the Four Tops on the first Showtime (a cable network) special on Motown.

MY GIRL

"TALKING 'BOUT" NOBODY BUT MY BABY

THE TEMPTATIONS



SUMMARY

The Temptations have proven themselves Motown's top male vocal group, a position they've achieved by competing with such groups as the Contours, the Four Tops, and the Commodores. Unlike the Four Tops, the Temptations have undergone numerous personnel changes, and they've changed their sound with new producers and new material. Credit for their achievements is due to their outstanding lead singers, notably Eddie Kendricks, David Ruffin, and Dennis Edwards, and their songwriter-producers, including Berry Gordy, Smokey Robinson, Norman Whitfield, Eddie Holland, and Barrett Strong. Special mention, too, should be made for Otis Williams and Melvin Franklin, tenor and bass respectively, who've been with the group from the very beginning, and Richard Street, who's been with the group for the past 15 years.

Z.Z. HILL

R E M E M B E R E D

By Bruce Huston

The compulsion to over-categorize is a problem that has long plagued popular music's critics and historians alike. Recording artists who are too versatile to be so neatly pigeonholed often end up being shortchanged as their worthier efforts go unrecognized by the music press. By the time of his unfortunate passing in April of 1984, Z.Z. Hill had racked up an impressively long string of Soul hits dating back some 20 years. Yet, as a Soul singer, Z.Z.'s talents were underrated, often by writers who ought to have known better. He was also a veteran blues singer of undeniable skill and appeal — in fact, the June 16, 1984 issue of *Billboard* referred to Z.Z. as "the leading blues singer of the 1980's." The late disc jockey John R., who was to blues and R&B what Alan Freed was to rock & roll, stated that at the time of his death, Z.Z. was "on his way to the winners circle with the likes of B.B. King and Bobby Bland." In 1971 Z.Z.'s fine bluesy reading of *Don't Make Me Pay For His Mistakes* even became a modest-sized pop hit. Yet, in the now standard reference book, *Blues Who's Who* (1979), Sheldon Harris failed to give Z.Z. Hill an entry at all. Only under Floyd Dixon's entry is Z.Z.'s name even mentioned — and that's just in passing. Most likely, Z.Z. Hill was omitted because Harris considered him to be more of a Soulmán. By the same token, many Soul writers would probably label him as more of a Bluesman. This pointless conflict has helped to put the recorded legacy of Z.Z. Hill into an undeserved limbo. Ultimately, it is the listener who has lost out as, one by one, Z.Z.'s albums have been quietly deleted by Columbia, Kent and United Artists.

No doubt Z.Z.'s versatility can be accounted for by his rather diverse musical background. His style reveals a strong gospel foundation richly nourished by elements of blues, R&B and southern Soul. Also discernable are the influences of jazz, country and especially rock. Born Arzel Hill in Naples, Texas on September 30, 1935, Z.Z. was already singing in the family church as a young child. His musical idol eventually became the late Sam Cooke who was then leading the legendary Soul Stirrers, a major gospel group of the early 1950's. Joining another such group called the Spiritual Five, Z.Z. incorporated a little of Cooke's influence into his own style. But when Z.Z. switched from gospel to secular music, he emulated the style of the great blues singer, Bobby Bland, a fellow Texan. When Z.Z. crooned a slow romantic ballad, traces of another Texan's influ-



ence, that of the late Johnny Ace, could also be detected. After winning various talent contests, Z.Z. was hired by the Rainbow Ballroom in Dallas where he became the resident singer. He also worked several club dates in the Fort Worth-Dallas area. By this time the singer had already changed his name from Arzel to Z.Z. He later told John Abbey of *Blues & Soul*, "I took the idea of Z.Z.

from my friend B.B. King back when I was just beginning to get somewhere. I admit I like the way that the B.B. bit rolled when you say it so I tried to think of something similar enough." Although Z.Z. may well have been emulating King, who was another of his blues heroes, John R. relates that it was actually a childhood nickname.

It was not until 1963 that Z.Z. went to Los

Angeles with his older brother, Matt, to set up his first recording session. Matt founded his own label, calling it MH Records. Z.Z. wrote both sides of his first release. The hit side, *You Were Wrong*, is a fine driving R&B number with a strong New Orleans flavour. In fact, it is quite similar to Jesse Hill's 1960 hit, *Ooh Poo Pah Doo*. The record grazed the bottom of *Billboard's* Hot 100 in March, 1964. (*Billboard* published no R&B chart at this time.) According to Clive Anderson, *You Were Wrong* amassed regional sales of 1/4 of a million copies. A follow-up on the same label failed to generate any sales. Also, an unsuccessful single for Mesa Records, another small L.A. label, apparently dates from this period. This disc features two compositions credited to Ozzie Palnick. *Five Will Get You Ten* is a compelling, bluesy item with a catchy swing and a Bobby Bland-inspired vocal. The B-side, *The Right To Love*, is a smooth ballad that one can easily imagine Johnny Ace crooning.

These early sides sparked enough interest to attract the Bihari brothers who owned the Los Angeles-based Modern/Kent label and whose chief recording star had been B.B. King since about 1951. Signing Z.Z. to their Kent subsidiary, the Biharis matched him with producer/arranger Maxwell Davis. From 1964 until 1968 Kent issued 15 singles by Z.Z. as well as three albums. Much of the material was self-penned.

The first release, *You Don't Love Me*, set the style Z.Z. was to pursue throughout his Kent tenure. A heavy funk-oriented beat, horn riffs, guitar and piano formed a backdrop for Z.Z.'s husky Bland-like vocals. Although sales were dependable, they were also regional. Z.Z.'s records sold heavily in the South and attracted some attention on the West Coast, but no national hits were forthcoming. A couple actually came close. *Hey Little Girl*, essentially a re-write of *You Were Wrong*, bubbled under the Hot 100 at #134 in August of 1965. In October of 1968 the imaginative *You Got What I Need* bubbled under at #129. Clive Anderson aptly describes this latter song as an attempt "to update Z.Z.'s sound by crossing the strutting Soul associated with Stax with the trickiness of a kind that Tyrone Davis brought off so well on his Dakar recordings."

Some other items from the Kent period deserve mention. The bluesy *Have Mercy Someone* bears a strong resemblance to Sam Cooke's *Somebody Have Mercy*. A completely revamped rendition of Rosco Gordon's 1952 hit, *No More Doggin'*, displays a Stax horn arrangement evidently patterned after Otis Redding's 1965 hit, *Respect*. Particularly infectious is the Z.Z. original, *What More*, marred only by a somewhat cluttered arrangement. Z.Z.'s final Kent release, *Don't Make Promises (You Can't Keep)*, was an attractive Soul styling of a tune by the late Tim Hardin which could easily have gone pop with the right exposure.

Kent also issued an album called *A Whole Lot Of Soul* featuring Z.Z.'s covers of several well-known Soul hits. Some of these are outstanding and a comparison between Z.Z.'s interpretations and the originals can be interesting and revealing. In *Nothing Can Change This Love I Have For You* and *You Send Me*, Sam Cooke's influence on Z.Z.'s style can be examined. To Clive Richardson, Z.Z.'s "atmospheric version of *You Send Me*

added a new dimension" to Cooke's standard. Likewise, Z.Z. sounds self-assured and sincere in his impassioned approach to such classics as Sam & Dave's *When Something Is Wrong With My Baby*, Percy Sledge's *When A Man Loves A Woman*, Jimmy Hughes' *Steal Away* and the late Chuck Willis' *What Am I Living For*. In *You Gonna Make Me Cry* Z.Z.'s approach is country-influenced, not unlike Solomon Burke's renowned style.

Looking at Z.Z.'s Kent period in retrospect, although several fine tracks were recorded, many critics would probably concur with Joe McEwen's general appraisal in *Rolling Stone Record Guide*. McEwen finds the Kent arrangements "often less than imaginative" adding that "overbearing horns tend to clutter many of the songs." John Abbey has quoted Z.Z.'s own comments regarding his departure from Kent: "I'd been at Kent for five years and while I had been quite successful, I was never really satisfied with the way my records were handled by the company. Some of the tunes we cut during those five years were really beautiful but they were never really pushed and there was no planning to the way the records were released."



In 1969 Z.Z. went to Alabama to record for Quin Ivy, who had been instrumental in making Percy Sledge a major Soul star. Two singles were leased to Atlantic but failed to generate much interest. *It's A Hang Up Baby* was an excellent uptempo piece of Muscle Shoals funk which effectively updated Z.Z.'s appeal. The flipside, (*Home Just Ain't Home At*) *Supertime*, featured a slow gospel-flavoured performance à la Percy Sledge, pulled off by Z.Z. with convincing intensity. If much of the Kent material was blues-based, these Atlantic sides presented Z.Z. as an adept Soulmán. According to Michel Ruppli's Atlantic masters volume, the second release, a moving performance of *Faithful and True*, appeared early in 1970 on Atlantic 2711. Curiously, Atlantic also assigned number 2711 to one of Mighty Sam's singles. Quin Ivy issued the song as well on his Quinvy label, but neither attempt proved successful.

Near the end of 1970 Z.Z. rejoined his brother in L.A. where he recorded his biggest pop hit. Song lyrics that conveyed some degree of social awareness and even social comment were becoming fashionable at the time. Since 1965 songs of

protest had entered rock via folk music and, by 1968, this new influence was filtering into Soul music. Embracing this new stance, Z.Z. recorded the Grayson & Lexing composition, *Don't Make Me Pay For His Mistakes*. The woman to whom the song is directed has had hard luck with her former lover and is taking it out on her current man. Fed up with her nagging, the singer tells her off with the startling lyrics: "Don't make me pay for his mistakes/He's the one who did you wrong!/He's the one who gave you six babies/And I'm the one who's trying to give them a home." Delivered against a throbbing, bluesy arrangement, this superb record reached #17 on *Billboard's* Soul chart and #62 on the Hot 100 early in 1971. The B-side, *Think People*, also presents lyrics of social comment. This time, though, the arrangement is close to hard rock — an influence Sly Stone, Whitfield & Strong and George Clinton had already been bringing to bear on Soul music.

This success prompted Kent to reissue *Someone To Love Me*, newly titled *I Need Someone*. A blues ballad that went to #86 pop and #30 R&B, it became Kent's most successful Z.Z. Hill single. Meanwhile, Matt Hill's worthy attempts to follow up his brother's hit on the Audrey label flopped. Of particular note was *You Better Take Time*, a Grayson, Lexing & Kober tune featuring the same storyline as Johnnie Taylor's *Who's Making Love*. This bluesy item was nicely propelled by its appealing guitar and horn interplay. Its uptempo B-side, *It Can Be Fixed*, was even more pop-oriented, but no airplay meant no sales. Even while the Audrey discs were being issued, Z.Z. began to record for Mankind, a Nashville-based label. This recording deal had resulted when Z.Z. rejoined Quin Ivy sometime in 1971. Ivy introduced him to the legendary singer/songwriter/producer Jerry "Swamp Dogg" Williams.

No doubt taking his cue from Z.Z.'s pop hit, Williams matched the singer with material almost as striking lyrically as *Don't Make Me Pay*. The resulting lp, entitled *The Brand New Z.Z. Hill*, devoted an entire side to a programme of inter-related songs describing a broken love affair. The lovers discuss their differences, agree to make up and, ultimately, get married. The idea of the "concept album", usually first ascribed to the Beatles, had become a common fashion in rock but was new to Soul. Later this thematic approach would be further developed by Millie Jackson in her 1974 album, *Caught Up*.

Surprisingly, *The Brand New Z.Z. Hill* even skimmed the bottom of *Billboard's* pop chart and produced three sizable Soul hits during 1971/72, including *Second Chance*, *It Ain't No Use* and the country song, *Chokin' Kind*. This latter number had already been adapted for Soul in 1969 when Joe Simon had turned it into a major pop hit. All in all, Williams' song-cycle opus, which comprises the lp's A-side (entitled *Blues At The Opera*), served Z.Z. well, giving him ample room to dramatize each lyric with memorable conviction. On the other hand, the spoken portions interspersed throughout do not wear too well with repeated listening. Aside from *Chokin' Kind*, the album's B-side also contains the magnificent Sam Dees composition, *I Think I'd Do It*, a driving, hard-hitting rocker with a great refrain. As well, there is a wonderful gospel-powered revival of *Early In The Morning*, composed by the late

Bobby Darin. Given an imaginative and rousing interpretation, Z.Z.'s version compares favourably with both Darin's fine original and with the famous 1958 hit version by the late Buddy Holly.

During 1972 Z.Z. rejoined Matt Hill in L.A. and began releasing productions for Hill Records through United Artists, both company logos appearing on the record label. As Z.Z. explained to John Abbey at the time, "I had reached a certain point with my career where we felt a bigger company would suit us best. We were looking for a special push, for a company who didn't have to stop at any point to achieve the goal." United Artists issued an album entitled **The Best Thing That's Happened To Me**. After two singles taken from it failed, Z.Z. enjoyed a Soul hit in the summer of 1973 with the third attempt, a cover of Bobby Bland's *Ain't Nothing You Can Do*. Smaller successes followed with Z.Z.'s composition, *I Don't Need Half A Love*, a revival of Little Willie John's *Let Them Talk* and a further Z.Z. Hill tune that had once been a pop hit for Freddie Scott, *Am I Groovin' You*. These were taken from a second lp simply called **Z.Z.**

A 1974 New Orleans session with Allen Toussaint produced the thumping, infectious *I Keep On Lovin' You*. This song, a considerable Soul hit which also bubbled under the Hot 100 for a month, led to the lp, **Keep On Lovin' You**. This album, according to *Rolling Stone's* Joe McEwen, "may be Hill's very best record." Of the lp's ten tracks, two were produced by Matt Hill, four by Allen Toussaint and four more by Lamont Dozier. Says McEwen, "Z.Z. proves to be a pliable stylist who fits well into the imaginative settings offered by all three mentors." Of Toussaint's creations, *My Turn* and *Who Ever's Thrilling You (Is Killing Me)* are particularly arresting examples of New Orleans R&B, the latter tune heightened by a chorus of Soulbrothers not unlike those who usually back Lee Dorsey. But it was Lamont Dozier's powerful *I Created A Monster* that became Z.Z.'s next sizable Soul hit in 1975. A stunning, guitar-dominated arrangement that places the singer's hefty vocal within a hard rock setting, this rousing production also attracted some pop airplay.

Soon afterwards, Hill Records and United Artists went their separate ways, the result of the latter label's desire to trim down its roster. During 1975 Z.Z.'s singles continued to appear on his brother's MHR label without success. *Mr. Nobody, Somebody*, a slow ballad of Detroit origin penned by Don Davis, Homer Banks & Raymond Jackson, was the first of these. It featured a moving vocal by Z.Z. set against a Memphis-styled horn arrangement. Otherwise, most of the MHR releases were just reissues of earlier sides.

It wasn't until 1977 that Z.Z. had his next important recording deal. Signing with another major, Columbia, he immediately came through with a big Soul hit. The Lewis & Johnson composition, *Love Is So Good When You're Stealing It*, is a southern Soul ballad whose frank lyrics describe an adulterous relationship. Quite reminiscent of Luther Ingram's 1972 smash, *If Loving You Is Wrong I Don't Want To Be Right*, the striking lyrics and controversial subject matter put Z.Z. right back in the vein of his past success, *Don't Make Me Pay For His Mistakes*. A Bert DeCoteaux production recorded in New York, it

reached #15 on *Billboard's* Soul chart and bubbled under the Hot 100 for six weeks. As Clive Anderson later observed, the tune also placed Z.Z. in "the first division, alongside fashionably candid performers such as Don Covay and Millie Jackson." The follow-up, *This Time They Told The Truth*, continued this trend, becoming a Soul hit early in 1978. The two hits brought forth the album, **Let's Make A Deal**. Reviewing it in *Crawdaddy*, Mike Freedberg noted that Z.Z.'s artistry was becoming more personalized and less indebted to Bobby Bland's style. In spite of a few weaker cuts such as *You Got Me Doing The Disco* and Z.Z.'s next single, an unsuccessful disco item called *Universal Love*, Freedberg noted that Z.Z.'s "moist, pungent voice stays with you." He was most impressed with *A Message To The Ladies* in which Z.Z. "cut loose like Wilson Pickett."



1979 brought two more singles plus an lp called **The Mark of Z.Z.**, but Columbia had clearly lost interest as each release slipped by unnoticed. Soon Z.Z. was without a label. He had, by this point, reached "the bottom of the barrel" as he told *Billboard's* Nelson George in a 1983 interview. Eventually, he found himself recording for Malaco, a small label in Jackson, Mississippi.

Z.Z.'s first single for Malaco, *Please Don't Make Me (Do Something Bad To You)*, was released in November of 1980. A slow southern Soul ballad, this number contrasted sharply with the sumptuous MOR sophistication of *I Don't Want Our Love To Be No Secret*. Z.Z.'s final Columbia single. In 1981 Malaco issued two more singles as well as an album entitled **Z.Z. Hill**, but little happened. Then in February, 1982 a second Malaco lp, **Down Home**, entered the Soul chart. This ushered in Z.Z.'s most successful period as the album peaked at #17 remaining on the chart for an amazing 93 weeks. The title cut was an exceptional blues workout, but it was the George Jackson tune, *Cheating In The Next Room*, that was to become one of Z.Z.'s all time best-selling singles in the spring of 1982. Originally recorded by Otis Clay, Z.Z.'s superb version reached #19 on *Billboard's* Soul chart, enjoying a 20-week run. This new-found success was certainly reflected in Z.Z.'s performing activities. As he related to Nelson George in the September 17, 1983 issue of *Billboard*, "In six months I was making \$10,000 or more (a night), depending on the city ... In some cases I've got as much as \$15,000." Z.Z. added that he was starting to receive offers to perform in northern cities such as New York, Chi-

cago and Detroit. "I've never had it like this in 20 years of performing," he told George.

Many feel that during his Malaco years Z.Z. Hill's artistry really blossomed. In disc jockey John R.'s estimate, once Z.Z. joined Malaco, he "began to perform more professionally in the studio ... He handled his lyrics with a lot of finesse, his style and interpretation were just about flawless." It was also during his Malaco tenure that Z.Z. began to lean more toward the blues, doing remarkable renditions of tunes associated with such blues worthies as Little Johnny Taylor, Jimmy Hughes and Koko Taylor. His approach to Soul music returned to a more traditional style. As the June 16, 1984 issue of *Billboard* reported, Z.Z. "brought back straight forward Soul" and showed that "there was still commercial strength in America's roots music." Certainly some of the credit for this accomplishment must go to Z.Z.'s uncompromising Malaco producers, Tommy Couch and Wolf Stephenson. Also, Z.Z. received a constant flow of superb material by composers who were in sympathy with his rich, easy-going voice and decidedly southern style. These writers included George Jackson, Denise LaSalle and the team of Shamwell, Prestage & Godbo, as well as writers who had once provided Z.Z. with past successes: Miles Grayson (*Don't make Me Pay for His Mistakes*); Jimmy Lewis and Frank Johnson (*Love Is So Good When You're Stealing It*). But perhaps the most important man behind Z.Z.'s 1980's success was Malaco's veteran promotion head, Dave Clark. Z.Z. credited Clark with breaking *Cheating In The Next Room* in New York, telling Nelson George that Malaco "knows the market for this music and they go out and fight for it." Such support he could never have counted on while recording for Kent, United Artists or Columbia.

In December of 1982 Z.Z.'s third Malaco lp, **The Rhythm And The Blues**, appeared on the Soul chart. Referred to as "one of his best" by *Rolling Stone's* Dave Marsh, it reached #16 and had a 51-week run. This album also spent five weeks on the pop chart. Highlights included the Denise LaSalle blues, *Someone Else Is Steppin' In*, and a thunderous, rock-oriented version of Willie Dixon's *Wang Dang Doodle*. For infectious, hard-driving Soul there was *Who You Been Giving It To*. Although no hit singles were forthcoming, the lp sold several hundred thousand as **Down Home** had done.

The following December saw the appearance of the album, **I'm A Blues Man**. As with its predecessor, it remained on the Soul chart for 51 weeks and peaked at #15. It also spent nine weeks on the pop chart. The title cut is a blues tour de force, tough-minded and unrelenting, while excellent uptempo Soul workouts are provided by *Three Into Two Won't Go* and *I Ain't Buying What You're Selling*. For hard rock enthusiasts there is the amazing *Shade Tree Mechanic*, a guitar-dominated belter whose double entendre lyrics are really driven home by Z.Z.'s blistering vocal attack.

It would appear that at the time of his unexpected death in Dallas on April 27, 1984, Z.Z. Hill was approaching the height of his creative powers. At age 48, he was also riding the crest of his belated commercial acceptance. His death from complications arising from a blood clot (as reported in *Billboard*) cut short a career that was still on the way up. An album he had completed just before

his passing was issued in November of that year. Appropriately entitled **Bluesmaster**, it spent 21 weeks on **Billboard's** Soul chart reaching #35. That same year Jerry Williams issued another memorial lp on his Rare Bullet label. Entitled **Thrill On The (Z.Z.) Hill**, it was comprised of selections from Williams' 1972 Mankind album, along with a few tracks which are presumably outtakes from those sessions.

Thankfully, interest in the Z.Z. Hill legacy has continued. Malaco's commemorative album, **In Memorium 1935-1984**, made the Soul charts in July of '85 and, at the time of this writing, a **Greatest Hits** package is being prepared by the same label. Meanwhile, it is also gratifying that reissues of material from Z.Z.'s earlier labels are starting to appear. Taken together, these lp's ensure that a new generation of listeners can have access to Z.Z.'s rich, earthy voice — a manly voice that is lazy, yet rousing; mellow, yet capable of fire. They also do much to demonstrate the talent and versatility that enabled Z.Z. Hill to fit so comfortably into a variety of musical idioms. As both blues singer and Soulmán he excelled as few artists have. ★



Z.Z. HILL DISCOGRAPHY



MH 200	You Were Wrong/ Tumble Weed	1963	U A 50908	Dream Don't Let Me Down/ Your Love	May 1972
MH 202	Come On Home		MANKIND 12012	Second Chance/ I Think I'd Do It	June 1972
MESA 200	One Way Love Affair	1964	MANKIND 12015	It Ain't No Use/ Ha Ha	
KENT 404	Five Will Get You Ten/ The Right To Love	1964	U A 50977	(Laughing Song)	Sept 1972
KENT 404	You Don't Love Me/ If I Could Do It All Over	1964		I've Got To Get You Back/ Your Love Makes Me Feel So Good	Nov 1972
KENT 416	Have Mercy Someone/ Someone To Love Me	Feb 1965	MANKIND 12017	A Man Needs A Woman/ Chokin' Kind	Nov 1972
KENT 427	Hey Little Girl/ Oh Darlin'	1965	U A XW225	Ain't Nothing You Can Do/ Love In The Street	Apr. 1973
KENT 432	What More That's It	1965	U A XW307	I Don't Need Half A Love/ Friendship Only Goes So Far	Aug. 1973
KENT 439	Happiness Is All I Need/ Everybody Has To Cry	1965	U.A. XW365	Let Them Talk/ The Red Rooster	Dec 1973
KENT 444	No More Doggin' The Kind Of Love I Want	1966	U A XW412	Am I Groovin' You/ Bad Mouth And Gossip	Mar 1974
KENT 449	I Found Love/ Set Your Sights Higher	1966	U A XW536	I Keep On Lovin' You/ Who Ever's Thrilling You (Is Killing Me)	Aug 1974
KENT 453	Gimme Gimme You Can't Hide A Heartache	1966	U A XW631	I Created A Monster Steppin' In The Shoes Of A Fool	July 1975
KENT 460	Greatest Love/ Oh Darling	Feb. 1967	MHR 221	Mr. Nobody, Somebody/ Think People	1975
KENT 464	Where She At Baby I'm Sorry	Apr 1967	MHR 224	You Better Take Time/ It Can Be Fixed	1975
KENT 469	Everybody Needs Somebody You Just Lie And Cheat	July 1967	MHR 228	My Girl/ Don't Make Me Pay	1976
KENT 478	What Am I Living For You Gonna Need My Lovin'	Dec 1967	COLUMBIA 3-10552	Love Is So Good When You're Stealing It/ Need You By My Side	May 1977
KENT 481	Nothing Can Change This Love I Have For You	Jan. 1968	COLUMBIA 3-10680	This Time They Told The Truth/ Near But Yet So Far	Feb. 1978
KENT 494	Steal Away You Got What I Need	Aug 1968	COLUMBIA 3-10748	Universal Love/ That's All That's Left	May 1978
KENT 502	Have Mercy Someone Don't Make Promises (You Can't Keep)	Dec 1968	COLUMBIA 1-11089	Whip It On Me Baby/ Just Because We're No Longer Lovers	Sept 1979
ATLANTIC 2659	Set Your Sights Higher It's A Hang Up Baby (Home Just Ain't Home At) Supertime	Sept 1969	COLUMBIA 1-11156	I Don't Want Our Love To Be No Secret/ I Want To Be Your Every Need	Nov 1979
ATLANTIC 2711	Faithful And True I Think I'll Do It Early In The Morning	Feb 1970	MALACO 2069	Please Don't Make Me (Do Something Bad To You)/ Blue Monday	Nov. 1980
QUINVY 7003	Faithful And True I Think I'd Do It	1970	MALACO 2074	Separate Way/ Chained To Your Love	1981
HILL 222	Don't Make Me Pay For His Mistakes/ Think People	Feb 1971	MALACO 2076	Bump And Grind Something Good Going On	1981
KENT 4547	I Need Someone (To Love Me) Oh Darling	Apr 1971	MALACO 2079	Cheating In The Next Room/ Right Arm For Your Love	Apr 1982
MANKIND 12003	Faithful And True I Think I'd Do It	May 1971	MALIBU 05820	Touch 'em With Love/ Faithful And True	1982
KENT 4550	You Don't Love Me Have Mercy Someone	July 1971	MALACO 2082	When Can We Do This Again/ When It Rains It Pours	1982
AUDREY 223	You Better Take Time/ It Can Be Fixed	1971	MALACO 2085	What Am I Gonna Tell Her/ Get You Some Business	Mar 1983
MANKIND 12007	Chokin' Kind Hold Back (One Man At A Time)	Sept. 1971	MALACO 2090	Open House At My House Who You Been Givin' It To	June 1983
KENT 4560	If I Could Do It All Over You Won't Hurt No More	Jan 1972	MALACO 2094	Get A Little, Give A Little/ Blind Side	Dec 1983
AUDREY 224	Sweet Woman By Your Side Ain't Too Proud To Beg	Jan. 1972	MALACO 2097	Three Into Two Won't Go/ Steal Away	Apr 1984
			RARE BULLET 4241	Hold Back (One Man At A Time)/ Put A Little Love In Your Heart	June 1984
			MALACO 2103	Shade Tree Mechanic Steppin In Steppin Out	Aug 1984
			MALACO 2109	Personally I'm Gonna Stop You From Giving Me The Blues	1985

THE VELVEETTES

Motown's forgotten girls, still finding fame as elusive as that needle in a haystack.



A late V.I.P. promo shot, left to right: Annette Rogers, Carolyn Gill and Sandra Tilley

Motown's most underrated female group, the Velveettes, are back together again after nearly twenty years of obscurity. The first group from outside of Detroit to sign with Motown, the Velveettes are best known for their hits, *He Was Really Sayin' Something*, *These Things Will Keep Me Loving You* and the group's biggest hit, *Needle In A Haystack*. Four of the original five members, Bertha Barbee — McNeal (Bert), Caldin Gill — Street (Cal), Mildred Gill — Arbour (Milly) and Norma Barbee — Fairhurst, have regrouped in their home towns of Kalamazoo and Flint, Michigan. These four plus Betty Kelly are the original members who started the group in Kalamazoo back in 1962. Bertha, then a student at Western Michigan University, formed a group who sang at parties and campus events. They became known as the Velveettes. "We picked the name because we thought we had a smooth sound", says

Bertha, "and because everybody was an 'ettes' at that time — the Ronettes, the Marvelettes." Bertha, who is a first cousin of Norma's, later recruited Milly's 14 year old sister Cal (then known as Carolyn) as the group's lead singer. After winning a talent show on campus, they met a nephew of Berry Gordy, Robert Bullock, who encouraged them to head for Detroit and Motown. The group auditioned in December 1962 and got a Motown contract a week later. "From then on, everything happened very fast," says Cal. "We would stay in Kalamazoo in school during the week and come to Detroit to record and do record hops on the weekend". They spent long hours in the recording studio helping out on other artists' records, such as Stevie Wonder's *Fingertips*.

As a recording act, the Velveettes got off to a false start in 1963 with the obscure *There He Goes*, issued on the tiny I.P.G. label. The song

was produced by Motowner Mickey Stevenson and reputedly features Stevie Wonder on harmonica. Within a year the group had resurfaced on Motown's VIP subsidiary where they were placed under the direction of Norman Whitfield, a young up-and-coming writer and producer. This resulted in the September '64 release of the Whitfield & Stevenson tune, *Needle In A Haystack*. A powerful and infectious rhythm & blues stomper, this song combines lyrics of proverbial wisdom similar in presentation to Whitfield's bigger hit of the day, *Too Many Fish In The Sea* by the Marvelettes, with an explosive percussive track which writer David Morse likened to a "jackbooted march-past of the *Wehrmacht*." Although the song wasn't a major hit, reaching only #45 on *Billboard*'s Hot 100, girl group specialist Alan Betrock observes that it "has since grown in popularity and in stature." Whitfield's follow-up was another irresistible crasher with an amazingly hip intro called *He Was Really Sayin' Somethin'*. Surprisingly, this record only placed the Velveettes as high as #64 on *Billboard*'s pop chart and #21 on the Soul chart in March of 1965. Perhaps the song's nonsensical scat chorus was deemed too silly by record buyers.



The original Velveettes line-up of 1962. Top left: Mildred Arbour, Bertha McNeal, Carolyn Gill. Bottom left: Betty Kelly, Norma Fairhurst.

In May, 1965 the Velvelettes tried a more conventional "Motown sound" approach with *Lonely Lonely Girl Am I*. Unfortunately, the result was not very distinctive. The record reached *Cashbox*'s charts placing #34 on the black chart and only #95 on the top 100. It did not appear on any of *Billboard*'s charts. The Velvelettes closed the year by returning to the style of *Needle In A Haystack* by way of another proverb. *A Bird In The Hand (Is Worth Two In The Bush)* sported an exciting vocal arrangement set against a thunderous rhythm track. It failed to register on either *Billboard* or *Cashbox*, becoming the girls' final Whitfield production.

Subsequent to this release, Motown discontinued the VIP label for several years. The Velvelettes were transferred to the Soul subsidiary. Production duties went to Harvey Fuqua & Johnny Bristol. August, 1966 marked the release of *These Things Will Keep Me Loving You*, a song the producers wrote with Sylvia Moy. It was an attractive uptempo number, but its rather typical "Motown sound" arrangement failed to give the Velvelettes a distinctive enough sound. The record made *Billboard*'s Soul chart but only reached #43. It bubbled under the Hot 100 at #102 but went as high as #71 on *Cashbox*'s top 100. This became the girls' final release. They appeared once more on record, singing on the introduction of Jr. Walker's live album, released in August, 1967.

It has been rumoured that an album had been planned for the Velvelettes but the project was shelved. The existence of some unreleased tracks in Motown's vaults would seem to lend credence to this supposition. These tracks also reflect the Velvelettes' struggle to find their own identity on a label that insisted upon a specific hit formula. *Stop Beating Around The Bush* uses a Martha & the Vandellas arrangement while *Love Is Good* sounds more like it was intended for the Supremes. *Gonna Let Love Live* is a driving R & B belter that also follows the Motown formula, but allows the Velvelettes to retain more of their identity. It sounds as if it was originally intended as an A-side circa 1966.

By the end of 1967 Bertha, Milly and Norma had left the group. Because of pregnancies and other obligations the number of Velvelettes has varied since the beginning. Cal stayed on, recruiting a number of replacements including Annette Rogers and the late Sandra Tilley. "I think about seven or eight girls had a Velvelette experience" Cal says. Betty Kelly departed from the group in 1964 to become one of Martha Reeves' Vandellas, a move also made in 1969 by Sandra Tilley.

In 1969 Cal married Richard Street of the Temptations and disbanded the Velvelettes at his request. This would have been the end of the group had it not been for Max Oates, a disc jockey from Flint, Michigan who got the group back together for a radio interview in May, 1984. This encouraged the girls to get back together to play a few local gigs, which in turn led to them playing a Motown reunion show at the Fox Theatre in Detroit in October 1984. Since then the girls have continued to play locally on weekends. The Motor City Revue, advertised below, took place in September, 1986.

In 1964 when Dick Clark selected two Motown acts for his *Caravan of Stars* touring company of groups, he picked the Velvelettes and an as-yet



The Velvelettes today, left to right: Bertha Barbee — McNeal, Norma Barbee — Farhurst, Cal Gill — Street and Mildred Gill — Arbor

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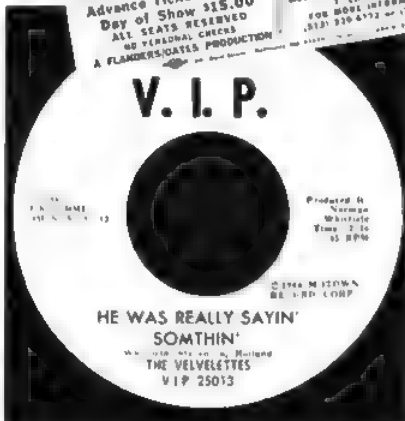
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The VELVELETES
"NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK"



unknown group called the Supremes. While they were on the road, *Where Did Our Love Go* began to climb the charts. It was one more piece of irony because the song could have been recorded by the Velvelettes. "Berry Gordy had intended the song to be recorded by the Marvelettes, but they rejected it as being too sweet," says Cal. "We got a chance to listen to the song, but before we could decide, the Supremes recorded it, and that was that. I still think we were every bit as talented as the Supremes," says Cal firmly. "But to be a success in this business you have to be consumed by ambition. Actually you have to kiss up to a lot of people to get anywhere. We all made our choices. Our families and children came first."



THE VELVELETES DISCOGRAPHY

IPG 1002	<i>There He Goes</i>	
VIP 25007	<i>That's The Reason Why</i>	REL /63
VIP 25013	<i>Needle In A Haystack</i>	
VIP 25017	<i>Should I Tell Them</i>	REL 9/64
VIP 25030	<i>He Was Really Sayin' Somethin'</i>	
	<i>Throw A Farewell Kiss</i>	REL 12/64
	<i>Lonely Lonely Girl Am I</i>	
	<i>I'm The Exception To The Rule</i>	REL 5/65
	<i>A Bird In The Hand (Is Worth Two In The Bush)</i>	
	<i>Since You've Been Loving Me</i>	REL 11/65
SOUL 35025	<i>These Things Will Keep Me Loving You</i>	
	<i>Since You've Been Loving Me</i>	REL 8/66

ONE-HIT-WONDERS

CHRIS BARTLEY

By Richard Pack

This article is the third of a series dealing with one-hit wonders, that is, artists who have had only one record in the U.S. pop 100 or the U.K. top 50. Many artists have had only one chart hit and then nothing. Such is the case with Chris Bartley whose one hit came in August, 1967 when his first release, *The Sweetest Thing This Side Of Heaven*, made #32 pop on the **Billboard** chart.

Chris Bartley was born in Harlem, New York in the shadow of the Apollo Theatre on the 17th April, 1947. He attended the Frederick Douglass Junior High and De Witt Clinton College in Harlem, where as early as 1959 he was part of a group called the Soulful Inspirations. From school Chris went on to work as an oxygen technician at a local hospital while continuing to sing locally in his spare time with the Soul Inspirations, who by this time had undergone numerous personnel and name changes.

It was as the Mindbenders that the group was introduced to Van McCoy by their manager Bill Downs. The group auditioned a cappella and although McCoy disliked the group as a whole, he was impressed with the voice of their 18 year old lead singer Chris Bartley, whom he promptly signed to his newly formed Vando label.

Bartley's first release on Vando was also the label's first. *Sweetest Thing This Side Of Heaven*, a ballad, was perfectly suited to Bartley's light tenor, and Van McCoy's string-dominated production makes this a perfect early example of what was later dubbed symphonic Soul. As stated earlier it was a smash hit, reaching #32 pop and #10 R&B. After the label's immediate success with it's debut single, distribution was switched from Cameo-Parkway to MGM, who must take some of the blame for not breaking any of Bartley's four follow-up singles. His final Vando record released in early '68, *I Found A Goodie*, is a Northern Soul favourite in England and has just been issued in the U.K. as the title track on a mini-album released on the Move label.

All of Bartley's Vando releases were composed, arranged and produced by that multi-faceted genius, the late Van McCoy, who also played piano and sang back-up vocals on the sessions. Bill Millar, who had previously spoken to Chris Bartley about McCoy's methods of recording, had the following to say on the subject in a 1971 issue of **Record Mirror**: "He would lock himself away for 2 or 3 days to concentrate on arrangements. Safe from interruptions he would build his own wall of sound. Every chart, every bass line, every string



Chris Bartley — the 1967 Vando model

section. An obsessional care goes into the making of each vast many-layered envelope in which to seal the singer's voice".

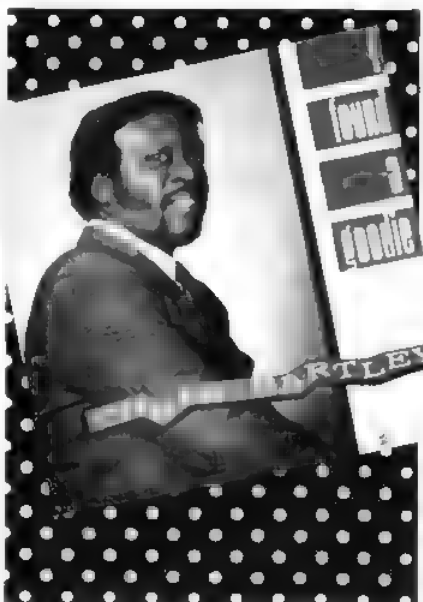
After the closure of Vando, McCoy placed Bartley with Buddah, and late in 1968 *Baby I'm Yours*, a song McCoy had previously had a hit on with Barbara Lewis, was released. A second single, *I Know We Can Work It Out*, a re-titled re-issue of a number from his Vando album originally called *Sugar Baby*, followed with no success.

In late 1969 Bartley gave up his career to nurse his bed-ridden mother, not returning to recording until 1971 when he signed with Musicor. His one single on Musicor did not measure up to previous recordings, and it marked the first release by him without the name Van McCoy in the credits. The song, *A Man, A Woman*, was written and produced by Ralph Murphy and arranged by Bert De Coteaux. Another release with the same credits surfaced in England on the Right-On label in 1975. *I See Your Name* was a light-weight disco item with an instrumental flip side. Somewhere around this time Bartley joined the veteran New York group the Ad Libs, who are managed by Bartley's manager Bill Downs. His voice is to be heard on the Ad Libs' 1983 release on the Passion label, *Spring and Summer*.

Interest in his Vando releases in the U.K. resulted in the issue there of a mini-album in April, 1986, which features three original Vando recordings, including his hit single plus a new recording of the Originals' hit of 1969, *Baby I'm For Real*. Although issued under the name of Chris Bartley, it is actually the Ad Libs featuring Bartley and Rhonda Hill as lead vocalists on the number. The

group's only original member, David Watts, delivers a short opening monologue to what is a rather disappointing version of this beautiful song. The track was recorded in January of this year with manager Bill Downs producing the session.

This brings us right up-to-date on Chris Bartley's career — 19 years down the road from his one hit single and still recording and performing today. Now a seasoned performer with a good day job, he is understandably reluctant to return to the music business full time except in the unlikely event of a very belated second hit single. ★



CHRIS BARTLEY DISCOGRAPHY

VANDO

101 The Sweetest Thing This Side of Heaven/
Love My Baby — 1967

3000 Baby, It's Wonderful/
I'll Be Loving You

3002 You Get Next To My Heart/
For You

14000 Truer Words Were Never Spoken/
This Feeling You Give Me — 1968

14001 I Found A Goodie/
Be Mine Forever

BUDDAH

93 Baby I'm Yours/
I'll Take The Blame

115 (My Baby's) One Wonderful Girl/
I Know We Can Work It Out — 1969

MUSICOR

1437 A Man, A Woman/
Tomorrow Keeps Shining On Me — 1971

RIGHT ON (U.K. RELEASE ONLY)

105 I See Your Name/
Inst. — 1975

MOVE — MIS 4

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I Found A Goodie/
Truer Words Were Never Spoken/
The Sweetest Thing This Side Of Heaven

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SYLVIA MOY

FROM MOTOWN TO MSR.

By Richard Pack.

Question: What do the following Motown classics have in common? — *I Was Made To Love Her, Honey Chile, Uptight, It Takes Two, My Cherie Amour, This Old Heart Of Mine and I'm Wondering*. The Answer: They, along with countless other Motown songs, bear the name of Sylvia Moy among the song writing credits. Sylvia, who has 15 gold records for songs she wrote during her Motown days, is one of the faceless names from the label's golden days. Born in Detroit, the second oldest of nine children, Sylvia did not know if she liked music or art better. Both kept her in school. Wanting to teach music she applied to Wayne State University which turned her down because she did not read music. Not missing a beat, she enrolled at Highland Park Community College and the Detroit Institute of Musical Arts.

Since money was short she started performing at local nightspots to support her stay in school, but could only make minimum wage singing. She was told the only way to make more money was to have a record released and in order to record, you need an original song. Sylvia tried unsuccessfully to obtain an original song before finding the perfect solution: She would write her own songs, and that she did. Off she went to New York only to be told she could sing well enough, but she'd never be a songwriter.

Back in Detroit, Sylvia was heard singing by Mickey Stevenson and Marvin Gaye who invited her to audition for Motown. She sang the two songs she had in New York, *I'm Still Loving You* and *Little More Love*, (both later recorded by Kim Weston). Motown offered her a songwriting and recording contract. While at Motown Sylvia wrote for most of the main acts, particularly Stevie Wonder, Martha Reeves, Kim Weston and Shorty Long, as well as becoming the label's first woman producer.

When Motown relocated to Los Angeles, Sylvia stayed in Detroit working with young local kids and started the Centre For Creative Communications. This led to her starting her own record company, Michigan Satellite Records (MSR).

I spoke to Sylvia in July 1986, at her beautiful home studio in midtown Detroit. A confessed eccentric and a rarity in the music business, she is devoting her time and energy to developing local talent and running her record label, rather than dealing with the hassles involved with major labels and name artists. Long may she continue to do so, and if the current Ortheia Barnes album *Person To Person* is anything to go by, I'm sure it won't be



Sylvia Moy — song stylist: an early sixties shot

long before you hear a lot more about this lady

WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST MEMORIES OF MOTOWN?

I was first assigned to Ivy Hunter who threw a track at me on tape and told me to take it home and write a song on it. Well I took it home and played it and there was nothing on it but music. I took it back to Ivy and told him that it was the dumbest thing ever, I'm not going to do it backwards and that we should write the song first, then arrange and cut the music to it. I'm not going to do this. So Ivy said, "Don't do it then". I had to go back more humbly than the first time and ask for the tape back. I figured out eventually how to write a song on that thing

IVY JO IS ANOTHER FORGOTTEN MOTOWN MAN

Ivy Jo is an extremely creative person. He had a lot of ideas like using the chains on *Nowhere To Run*. We were really into sound effects at Motown at that time. On almost all the Supremes' things we'd lay boards out on the floor and wear shoes with steel in the heels. There would be a whole group of us on those boards stomping all the way through and they would mike that up. I went through a period of tapping everything. I was just into sound

effects. A unique sound could sell a record.

YOU WROTE A FEW THINGS WITH SHORTY LONG
Shorty Long and I got really close. He was loud and just crazy. In fact, sometimes he'd remind me of that little guy on *Taxi* (Danny Devito). I mean Shorty was a mess, a real comedian.

I believe that Shorty had a premonition that he wouldn't be around that long and there was some things that he wanted said first.

HOW DID *I HAD A DREAM COME ABOUT* AND WAS IT MARTIN LUTHER KING INFLUENCED?

Yes it was definitely Martin Luther King-influenced. About writing it, usually if I collaborated with one of the producers or another writer, I had a lot of latitude and could decide what I wanted to write about and the whole bit, but this time Shorty told me he had something on his mind and it had to be written a certain way. He had the melody and kept playing it over and over on the piano, and I immediately felt something from it. I finally tapped into what he had in mind and told Shorty I understood what he wanted, but he'd have to leave me alone to work on it. Don't call me all the time like you normally do to see if it's finished. I stayed up all of one night just working on it. I just stayed with that track and came up with the vocal melody and the lyric. Shorty heard it and said that's it, that's got to be said.

It wasn't long after that he brought me one other melody called *Give Me My Flowers While I'm Living*. I said no, I'm not working on that. I changed that one around. I was beginning to wonder where he was in this stage of his life. Before I could finish it he died (a boating mishap while fishing in June 1969 - Ed.). He often tried to get me out on that boat. He loved to fish

I BELIEVE YOU WERE ALSO A PRODUCER AT MOTOWN?

Yes, although I never got label credits for it although I did get producing royalties.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST PRODUCTION?

My first assignment as a producer was Stevie Wonder with *Uptight*. At the time Stevie's voice had broken and they had decided that it was very possible that Stevie had seen his day and they were going to let him go. They announced that at a producers' meeting. At the meetings they'd go down the list of the roster and give out assignments. They asked for volunteers to produce Stevie and nobody wanted to do it. His voice had



changed and they didn't know what to do with him. After the meeting I went to the A&R director and asked if I could take it on. I told him that I didn't think it was over for Stevie. They had a meeting of the quality control board and came back to me saying, "OK Sylvia Moy, you've got your first production assignment. If you can get a hit on Stevie, we'll keep him. If not, we'll let him go."

At the time I had a bag of songs, but I knew at the same time that Stevie was messing with a bunch of songs himself. So I thought, he's probably got a better feeling for himself that I do, so first I'll

listen to everything he's got. I listened and he didn't have completed songs at the time. He was into sound then. He would come up with pieces of tunes from the keyboard. He played through everything and I didn't like anything. So I said, "Stevie you must have something else". He had just this one idea — "baby everything is alright uptight" — that was all he had. We continued working on it and came up with the hit, *Uptight*. After that we continued to work that way.

IS THERE A SONG THAT YOU AND STEVIE WROTE TOGETHER THAT YOU ARE ESPECIALLY PROUD OF?

My Cherie Amour. Although it wasn't the biggest immediately (*I Was Made To Love Her* was at 21 million), *My Cherie Amour* has turned into a standard and will live longer than I ever will. A lot of folks don't know that *My Cherie Amour* was first called, *Oh Marcia*. At that time Stevie would attach a girl's name to just about every musical idea he had. I said "Oh Stevie I'm sick of it I'm not going to call to it *Oh Marcia*. He said, "What are you going to call it then?" "I don't know", I said, "I'll surprise you".

TALKING OF GIRLS' NAMES TELL ME ABOUT THE SONG SYLVIA

OK. That was interesting. He wanted to write a song for me. He brought me an idea and the title and he wanted me to finish it. I felt difficulty writing it, so what I had to do to write the lyrics was to forget the title of the song and think about my boyfriend. That one messed with my head.

WHAT CONTRIBUTION DID HANK COSBY MAKE TO THE SONGS HE WROTE WITH YOU AND STEVIE?

His input was more arranging and putting together the track. The vocal melody and the lyrics and chord progression was usually Stevie and me.

WHO WAS L. HARDWAY ON THE CREDITS OF, / WAS MADE TO LOVE HER?

That was Stevie's mother — she didn't have anything to do with writing the song.

ARE YOU STILL IN CONTACT WITH STEVIE?

Yes he calls me sometimes. We're still cool. All the original Motowners seem to have a bond between them. Stevie was amazing. He could walk into a room and greet everybody by name. I've wondered to this day how he did it — I mean did we all have a special odour or what?

WERE YOU FREE TO WRITE WITH ANYONE AT MOTOWN?

Yes anyone. Stevie got peeved at me a couple of times, though, when I wrote a couple of things with Richard Morris for Martha Reeves. He got mad at me — he had a little attitude problem



Orthea Barnes

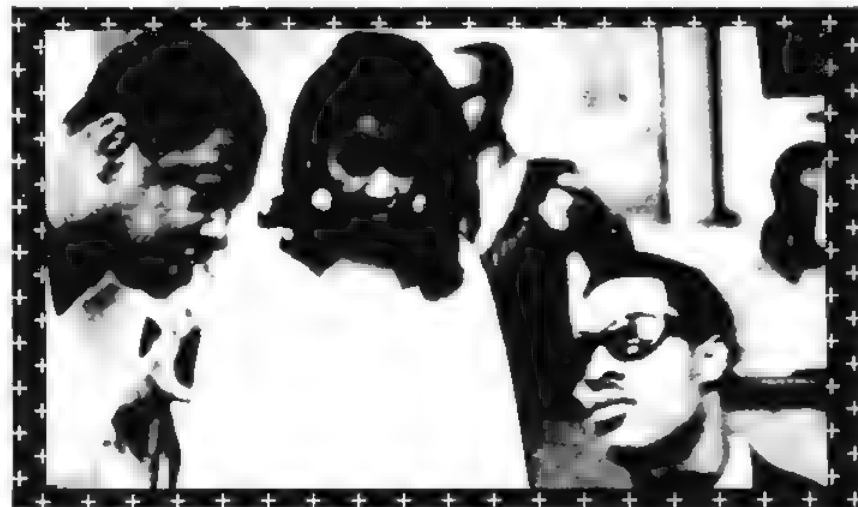
YOUR THOUGHTS ON DIANA ROSS?

Diana was Diana — when I first met her we were both kids. She was success-oriented then. She always said she was going to be a star and would go through whatever changes she had to with a smile! They would often tell her that she couldn't sing as well as say, Brenda Holloway, but Diana didn't care. She was determined to be a superstar no matter what

HOW DO YOU FEEL NOW ABOUT YOUR DAYS AT MOTOWN?

I had some hard times, but I wouldn't change it for anything. I got my Ph. D. there; it was school. For

me, Gordy built an empire with people who would have been neglected elsewhere. Motown had a song and we'd have to put our hands over our hearts and sing it on special occasions. *Dear Old Motown*. I think Smokey wrote it. Boy and did they have rules and regulations. If any of our artists were appearing live, we would have to be there. I'm very grateful for the experience I had at Motown. I think that the Gordys did something really great.



1967 — Steve Wonder plays over a number for Hank Cosby (left) and Sylvia Moy

TELL ME ABOUT MSR

MSR is a dream in the process of coming true — something that I dreamt about for a long time. After leaving Motown I went to California for a while. I didn't like it and came back here building a studio downstairs with the help of the educational board and started training young people to be multi-board track engineers. We rented it out to cut demos and some artists even started cutting masters there. At this time I got together with Orthea Barnes. I've always liked her voice. It inspires me to write everytime I hear it. The first master I put together was on her and Mildred Scott, recording under the name of Cut Glass a song called *Without Your Love*, which was a big disco hit. I then put the first single out on MSR on Orthea. *Touched* **Billboard** got hold of the record which resulted in the phone ringing off the hook. I couldn't press the record fast enough. I then issued a single on jazz trumpeter, Marcus Belgrave, and Orthea's album *Person to Person*

WERE YOU HAPPY WITH THE ALBUM?

Orthea has raw Soul — to capture that on record was really a challenge but I think we did it. I'm happy with it. In the middle of doing the album we lost a very close friend involved with the project — Darryl Bush. After his death, the album took on a different attitude to what we had planned originally. You notice that side 2 has a more gospel feel to it. We strictly went with feeling on that.

AN AMAZING VOCALIST, ORTHEA

She can sing anything really, but you get better results if she believes in the lyrics. She just puts that extra something into it. Sometimes she will sing a line differently to what I had in mind, but you just have to leave it in. Watching Orthea live is incredible. It's as though some other spirit works through

this lady. When she takes the stage there's so much feeling it's almost overwhelming.

DO YOU PLAN TO SIGN ANY FORMER MOTOWN ARTISTS?

Well Mariha Reeves and I have talked and also Gladys Horton of the Marvelettes. She's back in California now, but when she was here we went into the studio and cut a few things. She sounds great — better now than she did then.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Well I want to be sensitive — keep my finger on the pulse of the people; keep abreast of things. ★

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#1.: Interviews with James Brown & Irma Thomas. Articles on The Jaxxants, Motown members, Little Joe, Northern Soul, Ric He label and The Fascinations.

#2.: Interviews with Joe Tex and John Ellison (Soul Bros. 6). Articles on Milla Jackson, Motown Records, Jimmy Tucker, The Soul Sisters, Shorty Long, The Stax-Volt Story and part 1 of the Tamla label listing.

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SHARPEES

S T O R Y

by Robert Pruter

The story of the Sharpees is both that of a group and that of three individual singers, because each member — Herbert Reeves, Vernon Guy, and Stacy Johnson — were lead singers and each had a separate solo career of his own. The Sharpees, along with Alvin Cash and the Crawlers and the Five Du-Tones, were yet another talented act obtained by George Leaner's One-derful company in Chicago via the pipeline down to St. Louis. With their two hits on One-derful, *Do The 45* and *Tired Of Being Lonely*, the Sharpees are a solid addition to Chicago's hard Soul and dance traditions.

The origin of the group stems from the late '50's when a St. Louis guitarist by the name of Benny Sharp was organizing a revue around his band the Zorros of Rhythm. As with other St. Louis outfits, Ike Turner's Kings of Rhythm and Eugene Neal and the Rocking Kings, Benny Sharp sought to present a total entertainment review. He first obtained the services of a girl vocalist by the name of Jessie Smith and a vocal group, Charles Drain and the Tabs. In 1961 the Tabs left to pursue a recording career (on Wand and Vee Jay), and Sharp sought replacements, the first of which was Stacy Johnson.

Stacy Johnson was born in St. Louis, April 13, 1945. He joined Sharp's band from the Jules Carlos Review, where he and Herbert Reeves were working with a vocal group called the Arabians.

One night in 1961 Sharp and his band were playing the Red Top club with the Jules Carlos Review. Says Johnson, "I did a tune, *All I Could Do Was Cry*, which was my first solo number with the group. Well, Benny was impressed and he more or less offered me a job. So I left the group and worked with Benny."

Vernon Guy was the next singer that Sharp added. He was born in St. Louis, on March 21, 1945, and his first experience in the music business was as a member of a gospel group, the Seven Gospel Singers, when he was about 12 years of age. Although this group later went secular and recorded as the Cool Sounds, none of their sides got released.

Guy's next step in the music world came about after he bumped into Stacy Johnson. Says Guy, "He was singing with Benny Sharp, and they were playing at Chuck Berry's club up on Grand and Enright. Stacy introduced me to Benny and told him I was a singer. So they called me up to do a song that night and Benny liked what he heard, and asked if I wanted to work for him. I said, sure I'll work for him. He hired me right then. Benny



The Sharpees, 1965. Top L to R Stacy Johnson, Benny Sharp, Herbert Reeves. Bottom: Vernon Guy.

was working like five-six nights a week then. He had one of the hottest groups in St. Louis after Ike and Tina Turner."

The third member that joined Sharp was Horise O'Toole, born in St. Louis in 1943. As Guy remembers it, "Horise was staying around the corner from Benny. Like he was also working with this other group, the Originals, a local group. Horise was always around the house and always with us, and that's how he started with the group." The Stacy-Guy-O'Toole group first called themselves the New Breed, but later opted for the Sharpees after Benny Sharp. In 1961 this group recorded behind Jessie Smith on a local record that Sharp put out under the name Little Miss Jessie. The song was a lovely thing called *My Baby's Gone*.

In late 1962 or so, Johnson and Guy left Sharp and joined the Ike and Tina Turner Review, traveling on the road with them for a couple of years. While with Ike Turner, both Johnson and Guy recorded some singles for him.

In 1963 Guy recorded two singles — *Anything To Make It With You* on Sonja, and *They Ain't Lovin' You*, on Teena — but neither were spectacular and neither did anything upon their release. In 1963 Johnson recorded *Remove My Doubts*, which was on yet another Ike Turner label, Sony. Both Guy and Johnson also appeared on a live album of the review recorded at the Club Imperial in St. Louis and the Harlem Club in East St. Louis. Johnson sang the Ray Charles number, *Drown In My Own Tears* and Guy sang the Impressions' (*For*) *Your Precious Love*. Because of taping difficulties on the Guy song, his was rerecorded in Cosimo's studio in New Orleans with crowd noises dubbed in. The album was released in 1964 to no great acclaim.

In the middle of 1964, Johnson left the Turner review while it was passing through Dallas, Texas. In a not unfamiliar lament on the subject of Ike Turner, Johnson confesses, "I found Ike very hard to understand, and more so very difficult to get along with. With that, I guess when I saw an opportunity to leave, I left." In August, he moved to Los Angeles, got married, made up with Ike, and cut a record for him on Modern called *Consider Yourself*. The record upon its release in late '64 did well in a number of locales, including Cleveland, Louisiana, and San Diego. By mid-'65, Johnson was back in St. Louis, working with Benny Sharp's band, while the Sharpees were on the road following their first hit, *Do The 45*.

The genesis of the 1965 version of the Sharpees goes back to when Vernon Guy and Stacy Johnson left Sharp to join Ike and Tina Turner. Only O'Toole remained with Sharp, and he needed a true lead singer, and found him in Herbert Reeves, a St. Louis native born in 1947. Reeves had earlier sung lead for the Arabians, whom the reader may recall was the group from which Stacy Johnson got his start. As Little Herbert and the Arabians, the group recorded a single in 1961 called *Bouncing Ball*. The sound was a Frankie Lymon-type number. Soon after the Arabians broke up, Reeves joined the Originals (of which Horise O'Toole was also a member). When Guy left the Ike and Tina Turner tour in late 1964, he joined O'Toole and Reeves and a new Sharpees group was born.

The Sharpees would be recording within a year as a result of Sharp bringing the group to the

attention of One-derful's St. Louis connection. In East St. Louis, George Leaner had Mack McKinney working A&R and Eddie Silvers, who would go back-and-forth between his East St. Louis home and Chicago, writing and arranging for One-derful acts. Silvers had earlier been a horn man in Ike Turner's Kings of Rhythm.

The upshot was that McKinney brought the group to Leaner, who signed them to a recording contract. The first session was recorded at Oliver Sain's studio in St. Louis. The A side from the session was a take-off on Junior Walker's *Shotgun* called *Do The 45*. Although written by McKinney and Silvers, the music was credited to Berry Gordy's Jobete Music, even though *Do The 45* bore only superficial resemblance to *Shotgun*. To these ears the tune was original, and more than that, it was one of the most exciting discs ever put out by One-derful. With Sain's hot sax, and Reeves' forceful and swinging lead vocals, and the group's rousing chorusing, *Do The 45* really cooked. The flip, *Make Up Your Mind*, with lead by Guy, was by contrast rather tepid.

Although *Do The 45* never made any national charts, it succeeded well in a number of markets, especially Chicago, where it deservedly got tremendous airplay. The record's success was sufficient to warrant a tour for the group.

"After we recorded the 45," says Guy, "we went on tour, 'cause there was a dance craze for the thing. Junior Walker had out *Shotgun*, and we came back behind that with the 45. Everyone wanted to know who the Sharpees were, so George booked us up. We were working out of Queen's Booking Agency out of New York, and so we went on tour. Horise some kind of way had TB, however, and lost something like 40 pounds in 8 to 9 days."

"We were on the road in Cleveland, Ohio, and were playing the Music Box, and we sent him home from there. Horise really didn't want to leave the road, but if he had stayed, he probably would have died. We needed someone to fill the void, and I thought of Stacy Johnson. We taught Stacy the tunes we were doing, plus Stacy knew a lot." So when the Sharpees got back to St. Louis, Johnson was inducted into the group.

Leaner brought the new line-up of Sharpees up to One-derful's Chicago studio for the group's next session, which yielded the biggest hit of their career, *Tired Of Being Lonely*. The song was written by Larry Nestor and Jimmy Jones, and produced by Jones. Reeves' lead was marvelously forceful and soulful, and perfectly showcased by the rest of the group's chorusing and Nestor's imaginative arrangements. *Tired Of Being Lonely*, one of the top-notch records from the One-derful organization, first made the charts in several locales in late '65 and by early 1966 had reached the national pop charts. The flip, *Just To Please You*, was also a solid waxing, featuring Guy's raspy lead. The song was written by Sharp.

In the spring of 1966, the Sharpees followed with *I've Got A Secret*, a Silvers song that attempted to capture something of the flavour of *Tired Of Being Lonely*. The song, however, did not have much magic and it failed to interest the public.

Do The 45 and *Tired Of Being Lonely* turned the Sharpees into a nationally known act, even though neither made *Billboard's* Soul chart. The

group did the whole chitlin circuit, playing all the major theatres of the day. This raises the question as to just what constitutes a hit record. Supposedly, one could say the Sharpees had no hits, but then why were they in such demand? Relates Guy, "We were doing so much. George really did his best for us. Like when we played the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C., we did TV things as well. We played the Apollo twice, we played the Regal in Chicago twice. We were on a Smokey Robinson and the Miracles show; we were on a Stevie Wonder show."

In late 1966 the Sharpees went up to Chicago to record as a group again, but Stacy Johnson also had a solo session. Says Johnson, "Harold Bur-



well. He had come to East St. Louis, at the Blue Note, 4200 Missouri Ave. I was singing solo that night and Harold was impressed. And we went up for a session in Chicago. We did a session on the Sharpees and we did a session on myself."

"We had been driving all evening," Johnson continued. "As a matter of fact we had gotten off from the Blue Note and had driven up to Chicago. We checked in at the Roberts Motel, Harold wrote my songs there, taught them to me at the motel, and I think we had a session at one o'clock or so midday. So we didn't get very much sleep. We went right into the studio with some of the Sharpees'

things and then we did my tunes."

The two tunes finally released on Johnson were *I Stand Alone*, a New Orleans sound-alike written by Silvers, and *Don't Try To Fool Me*, a typically hard Chicago Soul number written by Burrage. They were not top-notch Leaner product, but both make worthwhile listening today with the edge going to the Burrage side.

The Sharpees' session yielded *The Sock*, a sharp dance number written by the Sharpees and arranged and conducted by Silvers. Instead of using Reeves in lead, the group sang the lead in unison with Reeves occasionally breaking out in parts. The flip, *My Girl Jean*, with the lead by Guy, was a lovely ballad that deserves a hearing. *The Sock* was funky and catchy, but it did not hit upon its release in late 1966. For awhile the group continued to do well gigging off their past successes.

"After *The Sock* came out," says Guy, we were headlining our own show. Opening we had Willie Small, a guy we brought from down South. Oh could he play guitar; he was one hell of an entertainer. We were home here playing at the Blue Note Club. The joint was jampacked and we were inside doing the show. We come out after the show is over, our car had gotten repossessed!

"We had bought a station wagon, and we had been paying Mack McKinney car payments. We didn't have a book, we were paying Mack a car payment every month. He would write out a receipt, and give it back to us. We figured he was sending the money into the place where we got the car from. He wasn't doing that; he was putting the money in his pocket. So we figured we didn't want to deal the Mack anymore. "The break with McKinney effectively soured the group's relationship with One-derful for some time.

Another break-down in the group came with a falling out with Benny Sharp. Explains Guy, "Benny wanted more money, him being the leader. You see, we didn't start out that way. We started out cutting the money straight down the middle, and when Benny wanted to get more money we all disagreed. Benny said if he couldn't get more money he wasn't going to go on the road with us. We hired another guitar player, and we stayed on the road until we couldn't stay any longer."

In 1967, the Sharpees were touring the southern states with the Drifters. Says Johnson, "the show wasn't doing anything. They had poor advertisements, poor promotion, what have you. Undoubtedly, they kept going into the hole, because they couldn't come up with the money. Finally we had to exhaust what funds we had made prior to the tour to get back home."

Back in St. Louis, the Sharpees and members individually continued to remain active in the St. Louis area. "We were broken up," says Johnson, "but we still worked together. We still kept in touch and still sang together, but each one of us — being each one of us were solo artists anyway — more or less started working with various groups for the monetary portion of it. We were getting more money out of working as single artists than we were working together as a group, because people couldn't come up with the money we wanted."

Continues Johnson, "Then I got back with Benny. Then I pulled Herbert back, and then Vernon. We worked for awhile, and then we went into the studio with some tunes I wrote, one of

which was *Music (I Like It)*." It was recorded at Oliver Sain's studio, but Sharp got it released on George Leaner's Midas label in 1969. Leaner's company, however, was only a surviving remnant of the One-derful organization, which had gone bankrupt a year earlier. Thus, even if the record were a strong one (which it wasn't), it had little chance of success.

The Sharpees stayed together until November, 1972, when a tragedy struck the group. Herbert Reeves was shot and killed. This put an end to one of the finest acts ever to come out of St. Louis.

Around 1981, Guy and Johnson formed a new Sharpees group with the addition of Bobby Williams and Guy's nephew, Paul Grady. The group makes occasional gigs around the St. Louis area and plans to record some original material they've

been working on. Said Guy in early 1986, "we're planning on recording this year. I know we got six good sides right now, and I know two or three of the six might do it, if we get the right deal with the right company. That's the main thing, get with the right company, because like as far as knowing the ropes now, I've took the licks and I know what's happening now. I don't want to just take the deal they give me. I want to offer our services and see if they buy what we're selling."

The perseverance shown by persons such as Vernon Guy and Stacy Johnson is admirable. I guess once one gets a taste of the entertainment business it is hard to get it out of one's blood. Guy's last comment is typical: "You know, I'll never give up. I might get out, but I won't give up."



THE SHARPEES AND RELATED DISCOGRAPHY

by Robert Pruter and Bill Greensmith

Little Herbert and the Arabians

Teek

4824 Bouncing Ball/
Condition Your Heart 1961

Little Miss Jessie

Mel-O

101 My Baby's Gone/
St. Louis Sunset Twist (inst. by
Benny Sharp and His Band) 1961

Vernon Guy

Teena

1703 They Ain't Lovin' You/
You've Got Me 1963

Sonja

2007 Anything — To Make It With You/
(inst. ver.) 1963

Stacy Johnson

Sony

113 Remove My Doubts/
Don't Believe Him 1963

Modern

1001 Consider Yourself/
Don't Believe Him 1964

Sharpees

One-derful

4835 Do The 45/
Make Up Your Mind 6/1965

4839 Tired Of Being Lonely/
Just To Please You 9/1965

4843 I've Got A Secret/
Make Up Your Mind 4/1966

4845 The Sock/
My Girl Jean 9/1966

Stacy Johnson

M-Pac

7230 I Stand Alone/
Don't Try To Fool Me 1966

Benny Sharp and the Sharpees

Midas

303 Music (I Like It)/
Part 2 1969

Vernon Guy

Electric Land

3 Ooh Vernon/
My Brand New Woman 1980

ALBUM

Kent

5014 Ike and Tina Turner Review 1964
Recorded Live (cuts: "Drown In My
Own Tears" by Johnson and
"Your Precious Love" by Guy)

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SOUL ALIVE

An Overview of Current Small Label Releases

By Ron Wynn

It's been over seven years since Irma Thomas, the Soul Queen of New Orleans, released anything on vinyl, and her last LP was a dismal, disco-diluted affair for RCS in 1979 which hardly represented her capabilities. Thomas, by all accounts still a riveting, sensual vocalist live, had been content to work in the Crescent City and earn a steady income there, while thousands of adoring fans the world over waited in vain for her to make the kind of triumphant vehicle everyone knew she could still cut.

Fortunately, the wait is over. **The New Rules** (Rounder, One Camp Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02140) fully presents Irma Thomas in peak form. There are sizzling slow and mid-tempo confessionals like *The Love of My Man* and *Gonna Cry 'Till My Tears Run Dry* as well as fine renditions of such contemporary tunes as *The Wind Beneath My Wings (Hero)* and the title track. The horn section plays with ideal restraint, providing just enough bottom and push to ideally support Thomas, yet not intruding or crowding her during critical moments.

Her timing, delivery and sense of dramatic projection are superb; she sounds every bit as convincing and alluring doing these pieces in 1986 as she did doing Dorothy LaBostrie and Allen Toussaint gems in the late 50s and early 60s. Sadly, the Soul embargo on urban and black radio has kept this great music off the airwaves.

Almost as good is Solomon Burke's **A Change Is Gonna Come** (Rounder). This LP, the followup to the great 1984 *Soul Alive* album which flabbergasted rock critics by racking up excellent sales despite minimal promotion, features plenty of smokey Burke Soul, particularly on Paul Kelly's *Love Buys Love* and *Let It Be You And Me*. There are two compositions by white Soul sages Dan Penn & Spooner Oldham on the LP, and they're both done in formidable, earthy soul/country fashion by the Rev. Burke. However my favourite selection is the title track: after hearing umpteen versions of this over the years I wondered if Solomon could find anything new to say on it. He certainly does, in a melody-shaking, twisting performance that utilizes not only his masterful vocal style, but also his adept preaching and rapping talents. Again, these songs need airplay, and they're contemporary-sounding enough to pass the technological muster of any fairminded urban/black station.

Benny Latimore & Denise LaSalle are two steady, consistent Soul performers whose current Malaco (3023 W. Northside Drive, Jackson, Mississippi. 39213) LP's aren't particularly different from their past work, but are nevertheless recommended. Latimore's **Every Way But Wrong** has some especially hot vocals along with fine song writing from a host of veteran Soul sages including Homer Banks, Larry Addison and LaSalle herself. Surprisingly, Latimore, a very gifted composer, didn't supply a tune for his own LP. The



Irma Thomas

energy level on LaSalle's **Rain & Fire** isn't quite as high as on some of her other LPs. She sounds more introspective and less fiery on a number of songs. But when she belts out a defiant warning on *I'm Sho Gonna Mess With Yo Man* or wonders about the wanderings of a mate on *Is He Lovin' Someone Else Tonight*, her familiar zeal returns.

Clarence Carter keeps churning out albums and **Dr. C.C.** (Ichiban P.O. Box 726477, Atlanta, Georgia 30339) doesn't depart far from the usual Carter mix of flickering, bluesy guitar, wily reflections and philosophy plus one or two plaintive ballads. *I Stayed Away Too Long* and *Try Me* are the strongest wailing tracks, while *Let's Funk* sounds a lot like *Let's Burn*, the 1980 song that proved a surprise disco hit. Carter plays a host of instruments, and adds quite a bit of synthesized colouration on a few tracks. If the intrusion of bleeps and blips into the Soul arena bothers you skip the uptempo pieces.

Betty Wright's **Sevens** (First String/distributed by Fantasy, Tenth & Parker, Berkeley, Calif. 94710) finally puts her back on track. These songs have that loose, kinetic vitality that stamped her best 70s tracks, and Wright sings with a surging, rising assurance. *The Sun Don't Shine*, *Share My Love* and *Pain* among others are intense, wrenching or suggestive numbers, with lyrics illuminated by Wright's searing, assertive treatments. Aaron Neville's **Orchid In The Storm** (Passport/Jem, South Plainfield, New Jersey) has inferior production qualities, but his jagged, tortured vocals on this six-song EP of 50s standards provide some poignant moments. However, nothing on the LP compares to the singles he made in the 60s and early 70s; pick up the LP **Make Me Strong** (Charly) or relisten to *Tell It Like It Is* on Parlo and you'll hear Aaron Neville at his straining best.

On the reissue front, there are some worthwhile entries for Soul lovers to savour. Relic's (P.O. Box

572, Hackensack, New Jersey 07602) **The Soul of Detroit** showcases 16 exciting, raw performances from many vocalists who've been ignored by black music writers awed by Motown's gleaming successes. Mack Rice, Betty Lavette, Al Garner and Charles Amos were singers who could shout and rock the house with any top Soul act; only Lavette has enjoyed a measure of success. This is a superior anthology; add a youthful sounding Eddie Floyd and the enigmatic but often compelling Joe Stubbs (Levi's brother) and you've got great music that shouldn't be forgotten or undervalued.

Jackie Wilson enjoyed such a range of music and performed it all with such elan and flamboyance that many people forget what a great Soul singer he was. **Jackie Wilson: The Soul Years Vol. 1 & 2** (Ace, British imports) should remind those who've forgotten that Wilson's octave-leaping, rich voice turned out a host of Soul classics in the 60s and 70s. Besides the obligatory *Whispers*, there are such greats as *This Love Is Real*, *Soul Galore*, *Because of You*, *My Heart Is Calling* and many, many more. I love Sam Cooke's music, but why isn't Jackie Wilson ranked right up there with him as a pure vocal talent?

James Brown's **In The Jungle Groove** (Polygram, 810 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10019) shows the transformation and evolution of his music from straight Soul to jazz-inflected funk. While this material was a precursor to disco, it was much more invigorating and joyous than what a lot of disco eventually became. Brown's blood curdling screams, rhythmic triumphs and vocal gamesmanship, coupled with a band that could take a groove and make it stand up and salute, resulted in music just as intriguing as his 50s gospel-based R&B and 60s downhome Soul. The Godfather still reigns today, but I'll take this stuff over *Living In America* anytime.

On the smoother side comes the Iceman, Jerry Butler. There have been a number of Butler anthologies and best of albums over the years, but Rhino's (1201 Olympic Blvd., Santa Monica, Calif. 90404) set covers the years 1958-1969, when the Iceman was moving away from supper-club/jazz ballads and into more impassioned, tighter tunes. The contrast between his singing on *Moon River* in 1961 and *I Stand Accused* in 1964 is considerable. Butler managed to retain his core sound, yet also sing with more punch and impact. Part of this must be attributed to the influence of Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff, with whom he worked in the late 60s. Their productions and lyrics, heard most effectively on *Moody Woman*, *What's The Use In Breaking Up* and *Never Give You Up* revealed another side of Butler's vocal persona, and the two albums they produced on Butler (**The Ice Man Cometh**, **Ice On Ice**) may have been his finest. If you don't own any Butler best of sets get this one, and even if you have everything he did the album's worth it for Denny Bruce's authoritative liner notes.



GEORGE JACKSON

THE SONGWRITER AND THE SINGER

BY ALMOST SLIM

Although he's waxed a handful of excellent Soul singles, with more than 2,000 titles in his BMI catalogue, George Jackson is best known for his songwriting ability. Most of his songs are Soul/blues compositions, such as the decade's largest blues hit, *Down Home Blues* by Z.Z. Hill. However, he's also scored a number one pop hit, *One Bad Apple*, recorded by the Osmond Brothers, while Bob Seger's vocal made his *I Love That Old Time Rock 'n Roll* an AOR standard.

Currently under an exclusive writer's contract to Malaco Records, Jackson has been providing material for their stable of R&B artists, including Bobby Bland, Little Milton, Benny Latimore, Denise LaSalle and Johnnie Taylor. A calm, humorous character, at the time of this interview (December 1985) Jackson was sipping a beer after completing a dozen demos at Malaco's studio in Jackson, Ms.

"I'm originally from Greenville, Mississippi," he detailed. "My mama raised seven kids on \$50 a month welfare check. Musicwise, there wasn't a lot happening. I chopped cotton, washed dishes—I didn't exactly study to be no brain surgeon! But I always had it in mind to make a career out of music."

Jackson's first step in that direction occurred when the Ike and Tina Turner Revue came through Greenville in 1960. The then 14-year-old pitched some of his songs to Ike, who thought enough of Jackson's talent to bring him to New Orleans to record at Cosimo's studio. Jackson waxed *Nobody Wants To Cha-Cha With Me* b.w. *Who Was That Guy*, on Turner's Prann label, one of the many labels the bandleader ran out of his East St. Louis home.

"I took it around to a few cities but nothing happened," recalled Jackson. "Distribution was poor so I went back to Greenville and tried to start a band."

Realizing Greenville was a bit too far from the bright lights, Jackson tried a number of various tactics to get a step ahead in the music business. At one point he travelled to Kansas City to audition for the Ted Mack Hour. He was unsuccessful. He also tried New York and Chicago without much luck, but he did manage to cut a single (???) for a disc jockey in Syracuse N.Y. Again, the results were negligible so Jackson once again wound up in Greenville back at square one.

By the early Sixties, he moved north to Memphis, where he hoped to catch on with Stax Records as a songwriter and an artist.

"They turned me down flat," said Jackson,



still with an air of bitterness. "Steve Cropper gave me bus fare back to the Greyhound station. You had to be into that Stax clique to get them to record your material. They considered me an outsider."

"Memphis Ma Rainey finally gave me a break and let me sing for a dollar a night at the L & H Club on Abel Street doing James Brown stuff. Later on I worked on Beale Street at the Club Handy and the Queen Ann Hotel, but Beale was on the way down then."

Things began to improve by 1965, when Jackson joined the Ovations, penning their biggest hit, *It's Wonderful To Be In Love*. The song was recorded for a new Memphis label, Goldwax, becoming his first chart record. Besides penning a number of followups for the Ovations, Jackson wrote the occasional side for the label's other important artists, James Carr and Spencer Wiggins, the latter's *Old Friend* b.w. *Walking Out On You*, making considerable noise in the South although it didn't chart.

Jackson had left Goldwax by 1968, hoping to further a solo singing career. He stopped by Hi Records, who were impressed enough to cut a single with him, but they suggested he show some of his material to Billy Sherrill in Nashville. Sherrill in turn referred Jackson to Rick Hall in Muscle Shoals, Alabama who immediately signed him up to a \$20 a week Fame Publishing contract.

Once given the chance, Jackson really hit his stride as a songwriter. Almost immediately he knocked out Clarence Carter's *Too Weak To Fight* and Wilson Pickett's *A Man and A Half*, both strong chart contenders in 1968.

"That's when I really started looking at myself as a songwriter more than an artist," he said. "When I started getting those BMI checks and seeing my name in the charts every week I started looking in another direction. Up until then I still looked at songwriting as a hobby."

While at Fame, Jackson was afforded the opportunity to record some of his own material, with two singles being issued under the Fame banner as well as one single being leased to Chess. His first Fame single, *Find 'Em, Fool 'Em, Forget 'Em*, was a modest seller but it didn't nearly approach the success other Fame artists were achieving.

Among the many fine songs Jackson wrote for other artists during his tenure at Fame were Candi Staton's *I'm Just A Prisoner* and *I'd Rather Be An Old Man's Sweetheart*, Spencer Wiggins' *Double Lovin'* and Clarence Carter's *Gittin' The Bills But No Merchandise*, among others.

By 1972, Fame began concentrating on recording pop hits, so Jackson returned to Memphis where he began another short flirtation with Hi Records. Hi released a couple of George Jackson singles and a few of his songs were used by Ann Peebles, Syl Johnson, O.V. Wright and Otis Clay. However, Hi and the other Memphis labels never really took full advantage of Jackson's talent.

"I love Willie Mitchell," says Jackson, referring to Hi's producer. "But Hi didn't make it because they put all of their push behind Al Green. When he left, down went Hi."

The subject of Stax records is still an obvious sore spot with Jackson as well. "Put this down," commanded Jackson. "Stax was run by a bunch of crooks who screwed over everybody. They went down because they were too busy stealing money from each other. Finally the bank walked in and said, 'Hey, what about our money?'"

"They were thieves. In one room you'd be playing your song and in another they'd have somebody with a guitar copying down your melody and the lyrics. When Stax went under I went out and partied. I'm still drinking over it!"

"If the studios in Memphis would have just used the same kind of business sense Berry Gordy had, they could have built a recording empire here, but now there's practically nothing left in Memphis."

As luck would have it, Jackson's largest commercial success happened quite by accident when Bob Seger was in Muscle Shoals and happened to be listening to an old tape of George Jackson demos.

"There were ten songs," laughs Jackson. "The last one was *I Love That Old Time Rock and Roll*, and he just flipped over it. He didn't even bother recutting it. They just took my voice off the demo and he went in the studio and sang over the track."

"Man you should have seen the checks I started

getting on that one. Then I started getting calls from Tina Turner, Liza Minnelli, James Brown — everyone wanted songs."

Although the songwriter's royalties were pouring in, Jackson hadn't completely abandoned his career as a recording artist. MGM took an interest in Memphis for a short time in the early Seventies, forming the Pride subsidiary and hiring Gene "Bowlegs" Miller as a producer. Jackson had three singles appear under his own name in 1973 and '74, the best perhaps being (*If I Could Just Get On That*) *Soul Train*. In addition many of his songs were also employed by other artists on the label.

In what turned out to be a shrewd business deal, Jackson had formed his own publishing concern, Happy Hooker Music, publishing *Trying To Live My Life Without You* by the previously unknown writer Eugene Williams. Although Otis Clay had a mild R&B hit with it in the mid-Seventies, lo and behold Bob Seger made it a Top 10 hit in 1981. "Yeah I got some nice checks on that one too," chuckles Jackson.

Until recently, Jackson stayed in the Muscle Shoals sounds circle of writers, although his material increasingly turned up on other labels. According to Malaco's Stewart Madison, who was responsible for inking Jackson as an exclusive Malaco song smith, "George has always been a top-notch writer. Even before we bought Muscle Shoals Sounds (August 1985) we always had a couple of George's songs on our albums. Now we've got an opportunity to work even closer with him and it's turned out great."

Jackson allows that there's no secret to becoming a successful songwriter. "Just hard work and a little luck. I've stayed up all night drinking hot beer to get one line to fit a song."

"I get a lot of my ideas from listening to people talk," he specified. "I look for a title and then try to work the lyrics around it. I prefer writing with a specific artist in mind because you can write to their specific strengths and weaknesses."

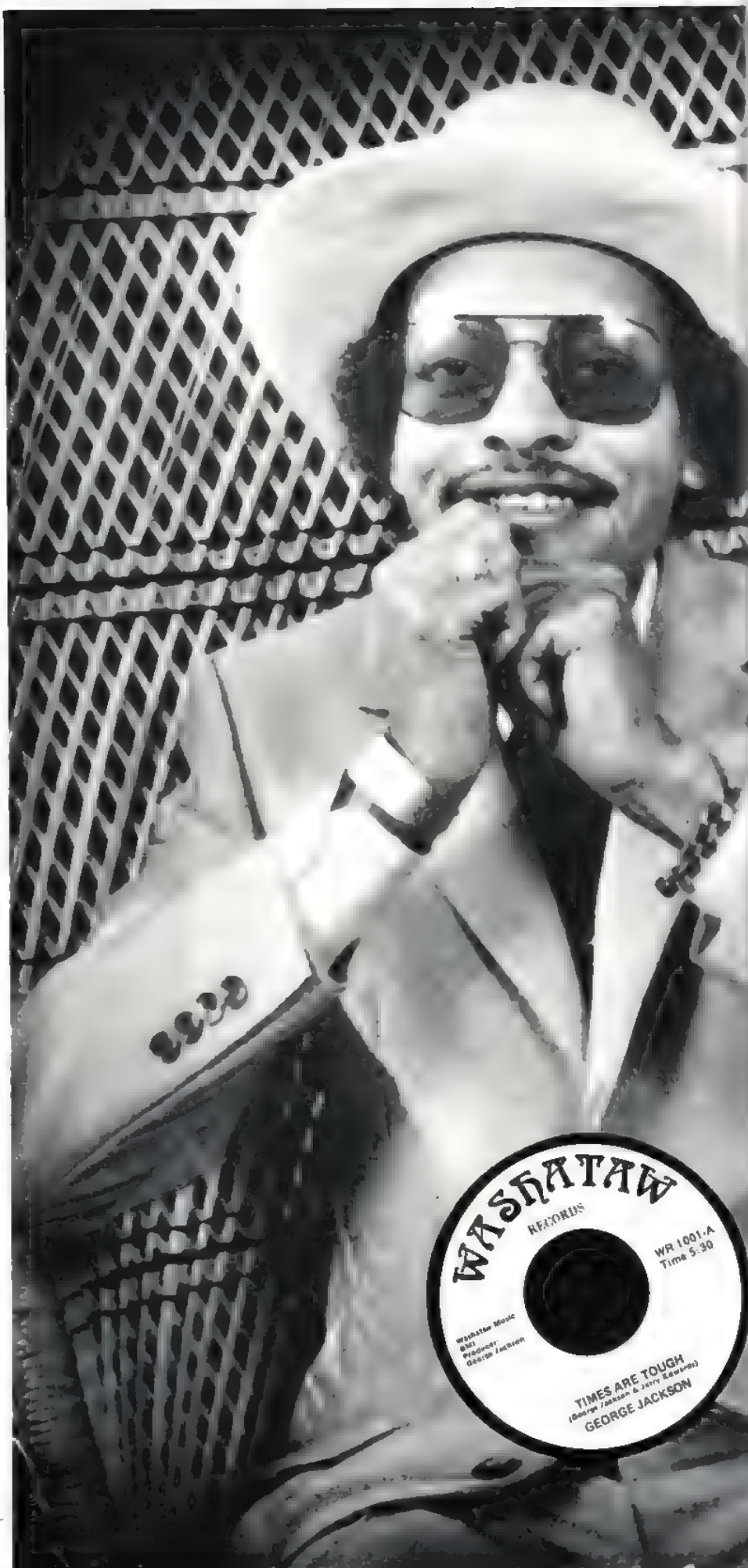
But as Jackson adds, "It doesn't always work out that way." A case in point is one of Jackson's best known Malaco compositions, *Down Home Blues*, a classic by anyone's standard.

"That song was ten years old before Z.Z. Hill ever heard it," said Jackson. He notes that Malaco producer "Tommy Couch heard it on a tape over in Muscle Shoals and really liked it."

The lyrics were inspired by a conversation overheard by Jackson in a motel where he was staying. "There were two maids talking to each other," laughed Jackson. "One of them said to her partner, 'My old man's gonna wanna fight when he finds out how late I'm gonna get home tonight. But I'm still gonna get my head bad and listen to those down home blues.' So I just sat down that afternoon and put together the song on my tape recorder."

Jackson seems content in his new relationship with Malaco as songwriter in residence. "I think I can come up with a few more hits," he allowed. "I've written some real strong things for Bobby Bland, Johnnie Taylor and even Denise LaSalle."

"I'm still enthusiastic about the business but I can't see myself keeping the same pace I did 15 years ago. Instead of trying to write 20 or 30 songs, now I'm just concentrating on writing one really good one." ★



THE GEORGE JACKSON DISCOGRAPHY

PRANN 5003	<i>Won't Nobody Cha-Cha With Me</i> <i>Who Was That Guy</i>	REL: /63	MGM 14680	<i>We've Only Just Begun</i> <i>You Can't Run Away From Love</i>	REL: /73
DECCA 32317	<i>Wonderful Dream</i> <i>Dancing Man</i> <i>(recorded as Bart Jackson)</i>	REL: /68	MGM 14732	<i>How Can I Get Next To You?</i> <i>Willie Lump Lump</i>	REL: /74
FAME 1457	<i>Find'em, Fool'em and Forget'em</i> <i>My Desires Are Getting The Best Of Me</i>	REL: 7/69	MGM 14767	<i>(If I Could Get On That)</i> <i>Soul Train</i> <i>Smoking and Drinking</i>	REL: /74
FAME 1468	<i>That's How Much You Mean To Me</i> <i>I'm Gonna Hold On</i> <i>(To What I Got)</i>	REL: 5/70	CHESS 2167	<i>Things Are Getting Better</i> <i>Macking On You</i>	REL: /75
HI 2130	<i>I'm Gonna Wait</i> <i>So Good To Me</i>	REL: /69	ER MUSIC 101	<i>Talking About The Love</i> <i>I Have For You</i> <i>I Don't Need You No More</i>	REL: /76
HI 2212	<i>Aretha Sing One For Me</i> <i>I'm Gonna Wait</i>	REL: 4/72	MUSCLE SHOALS SOUNDS 9801	<i>Fast Young Lady</i> <i>Funky Disco Music</i>	REL: /79
HI 2236	<i>Let Them Know You Care</i> <i>Patricia</i>	REL: 3/73	WASHATAU 1001	<i>Times Are Tough</i> <i>Bringing It Home To Me</i>	REL: /84
			HAPPY HOOKER 1080	<i>Sam, We'll Never Forget You</i> <i>A Little Extra Stroke</i>	REL: /85

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ALBUM REVIEWS



Z.Z. HILL GREATEST HITS MALACO 7437

Cheatin' In The Next Room/Down Home Blues/Please Don't Let Our Good Thing End/Right Arm For Your Love/Open House At My House/Someone Else Is Steppin' In/Get A Little, Give A Little/Shade Tree Mechanic/Three Into Two Won't Go/Stop You From Givin' Me The Blues/Friday Is My Day

During his years with the Malaco label, Z.Z. Hill was far more important as an album artist than as a singles artist. Hence **The Best Of Z.Z. Hill** would have been a more appropriate title for this so-called "Greatest Hits" lp. Since *Cheatin' In The Next Room* is the only major Soul hit he had on this label, the choosing of material to fill out the album seems to have been a somewhat arbitrary task. To this writer's mind the inclusion of *Who You Been Giving It To*, *Wang Dang Doodle* and *I'm A Blues Man* ought to have been mandatory. Even so, the compiler has still done an admirable job of representing Z.Z. in all his musical versatility. *Get A Little, Give A Little* and *Please Don't Let Our Good Thing End* ably represent Z.Z.'s way with slow Soul ballads while *Three Into Two Won't Go* and the rocker *Shade Tree Mechanic* demonstrate the singer's exciting approach to uptempo belters. Even Z.Z.'s gospel influence comes to the fore in one selection entitled *Stop You From Giving Me The Blues* — a performance Ray Charles would surely enjoy. But this album is mainly devoted to the blues. The year before he died Z.Z. was voted "Best Vocalist Of The Year" in the **W.C. Handy International Blues Awards**. *Open House At My House*, *Down Home Blues* and *Friday Is My Day* readily attest to Z.Z.'s mastery of this idiom. But his rich voice and magnetic presence are evident in all of the tracks. With the inclusion of Z.Z.'s well-deserved hit, *Cheatin' In The Next Room*, and its infectious funky flipside, *Right Arm For Your Love*, this package serves as an excellent tribute to Z.Z.

Hill's artistry and to his creative Malaco years.

Bruce Huston



MIGHTY SAM McCLAIN FEATURING WAYNE BENNETT LIVE IN JAPAN

Dead Ball DB-2508

Fannie Mae/Sweet Dreams/Forgive & Forget/Gone For Good/Whatever It Takes/A Change Is Gonna Come/The Lord Will Make A Way/In The Same Old Way/The Blues Is Alright

Mighty Sam's up and down career (see *The Mighty Sam Story*, by Almost Slim — **Soul Survivor** Vol. 2, Number 4) seems to be enjoying a recent upswing. *Live In Japan* documents his late April '86 concerts in Tokyo, backed by American cohort Wayne Bennett on guitar and the six piece Backbeats. The years of erratic acceptance and other career woes have done little to diminish the rough-hewn country soul vocalist's intensity in performance. Alas this is not the definitive live recording that crystallizes McClain's art for deservedly larger audience.

Sam's conviction burns brightly throughout the proceedings; however his plaintive beacon is frequently obscured by the Backbeats' distracting instrumental arabesques and all-around overplaying. To his credit, Wayne Bennett's laid-back "southern feel" guitar work manages to lend some ballast. This is not a bad record; it just lacks a sense of gravity.

The slowburn *Gone For Good* works well. Its stripped down arrangement leaves plenty of room for the Mighty One to display his considerable talents. *Sweet Dreams*, the Don Gibson tune Sam first recorded for the Amy Label in 1966 also receives a nice treatment. Other standouts include *Forgive and Forget* and Sam's interpretation of the evergreen, *A Change Is Gonna Come*.

Kudos to Vivid Sound and their Dead Ball subsidiary for seeing that deserved American talent is given the opportunity to make its music

heard.

The packaging is tasteful and restrained.

Apparently a current Mighty Sam studio LP has just been released. If this recording is any indication, it should definitely be worth checking out.

Michael Clifton



ORTHEIA BARNES PERSON TO PERSON

MSR 508107XB

Drive Me To Love/Touched/Green-Eyed Monster/Doin' The Do/I'll Give/Life (Ain't Complicated)/I Know Your Love Will See Me Through (In The Storm)/Person To Person.

This is the first album released from the MSR label and also a first for Detroit's own Ortheia Barnes, after nearly 25 years as a recording artist. Ortheia, the younger sister of J.J. Barnes, is something of a legend in Detroit, singing constantly to sell-out audiences. This creative compilation of original songs, all bearing the mark of former Motown writer and producer Sylvia Moy, features Ortheia in a variety of styles. The album ranges from the disco-oriented *Person To Person* and *Drive Me To Love*, with its jazz undertones, to the intense ballad *Touched*. But the cream tracks are to be found on side two, where the first three tracks merge into one long 16 minute track to produce what, for me, has been my turntable hit of the year. *I'll Give* exposes Ortheia's gospel roots, while the infectious *Life (Ain't Complicated)* has a wistful feel to it, created by Luis Resto's whistling synthesizer sound effects. Rounding off this trio of tracks is *I Know Your Love Will See Me Through*, which along with the above two tracks deserves a special mention for its lyrical content.

In summary, this is an excellent example of the "New Detroit" sound and it's unfortunate that being on an independent label will destine this album to obscurity — leaving it to be discovered and acclaimed by some future generation of music

lovers. An album you won't find in you local stores, it is still one that's well worth searching for. Available from:

— Michigan Satellite Records,
1611 Webb, Detroit, MI. 48206, USA.

Joe Baker



MARVIN GAYE MOTOWN REMEMBERS MARVIN GAYE (Never-Before-Released Masters)

Tamla 6172

The World Is Rated X/Lonely Lover/Just Like A Man/I'm Going Home/No Greater Love/Dark Side Of The World/Loving And Affection/I'm In Love With You/That's The Way It Goes/I Gotta Have Your Lovin'/Baby I'm Glad That Things Worked Out So Well/Baby (Don't You Leave Me)

Put simply, **Motown Remembers Marvin Gaye** is a nice idea that was scuttled by bad judgment. The nice idea was to release 12 of the late Soul master's previously unavailable songs, covering a fairly wide period (1963-72) of his remarkable career at Motown. The bad judgment was the decision to let various musicians, supervised by Hal Davis, to record new musical overdubs, featuring synthesized keyboards and drums, over the existing tracks. The resulting LP is still worthwhile but, in the end, quite disappointing.

To be fair, it is worth noting that several of the tracks here (*Just Like A Man*, *Loving And Affection*, *I'm In Love With You*) would not be top-flight Gaye under any circumstances. However, the new overdubs unfortunately rob even the best tracks of a lot of their atmosphere, rhythmic power and Soul. One honestly wonders, for example, what would motivate anyone to put syn-drum parts on these tracks when Motown in its heyday had one of the most vital, distinctive and influential drum sounds in all of pop music. In spite of this, the LP is a fairly accurate representation of Gaye's various musical interests, covering his spiritualism (*No Greater Love*), his societal concerns (*The World Is Rated X*), his light, infectious, uptempo efforts (*Baby I'm Glad*) and his dark, desperate romanticism (*Dark Side Of The World*, the best track, which is sufficiently gritty and yet has a beautiful, sweeping melodic line). Of special historical interest is *Lonely Lover*, which, in its unsynthesized version, has been available as a bootleg, for several years.

It has been theorized that Motown "enhanced" the music here to try to sell 45s from the LP to a market which, while it prefers the contemporary sound, is also fascinated by all the controversy and revelations which have followed Gaye's death. Perhaps Motown merely felt it was genuinely doing the deceased artist and his fans a favour by modernizing his music. Whatever the reason they should have left well enough alone.

Chris Edwards.

WILLIAM BELL THE SOUL OF A BELL

Atlantic SD 7719

Everybody Loves A Winner/You Don't Miss Your Water/Do Right Woman — Do Right Man/I've Been Loving You Too Long/Nothing Takes The Place Of You/Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye/Eloise (Hang On In There)/It's Happening All Over/Any Other Way/Never Like This Before/You're Such A Sweet Thing

William Bell is generally regarded as perhaps the most underrated Soul man from the Stax-Volt roster of the 1960s. A labelmate of Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett, he didn't really have the charismatic, aggressive quality that would have made him as big a star as those two, but he did record a healthy string of hits, in addition to writing several songs for other Stax-Volt artists.

Canadian Atlantic, as part of a new reissue series of nine Soul LPs from 1960's and early '70s, has rereleased Bell's 1967 LP *Soul of a Bell* and the LP, while not outstanding, does nicely illustrate Bell's particular style in the context of the Stax-Volt sound. Stylistically, the music has such Stax trademarks as "fat back" drums, earthy horns and generally spare production, but Bell's own gospel background probably accounts for the churchy, melancholy piano present on several tracks. Qualitatively, most of the better material is uptempo stuff on side two, especially the marvelous *Never Like This Before*, which boasts one of Stax's most punchy horn parts of medium- to slow-paced ballads, but, with the exception of *You Don't Miss Your Water* and the lovely, doleful *Everybody Loves A Winner*, they are all competent, pleasant covers of 60s Soul standards that, unsurprisingly, were handled somewhat more memorably by the original artists (eg. Toussaint McCall's *Nothing Takes The Place Of You*).

One final note: although this reissue has been digitally remastered, it still suffers a common problem among Atlantic reissues. Because it is in stereo, rather than the original mono, surface noise (present because Stax-Volt tracks were generally recorded at too low a volume) is noticeable. At any rate, Canadian Atlantic deserves credit for making this LP available again and at a budget-line price.

****/2

Chris Edwards

SWEET SOUL MUSIC

Book Review by HANK DAVIS

PETER GURALNICK has evolved a literary style that is every bit as distinctive as the music he

writes about. In the past, Guralnick has turned his attention to the blues, rockabilly and country music, and his books **Feel Like Going Home** and **Lost Highway** have received wide critical acclaim. Here, Guralnick tackles the world of Soul Music and, by his own admission, the subject is a lot more difficult to put into sharp focus. Indeed, Guralnick notes that the emphasis of his book shifted considerably as the project continued to grow. He was wise to give it free rein.

SWEET SOUL MUSIC, like Guralnick's best work, is not so much a unified work as it is a series of well observed portraits bound by a common theme. Taken as such, the book succeeds admirably. There is fascinating material about individuals such as Sam Cooke, Solomon Burke, Joe Tex, Otis Redding, and many other of Soul Music's heroes on both sides of the microphone.

But the most memorable portrait in the entire book is not of an individual, but of a recording company — the legendary Stax label, whose Memphis operation was at the core of Soul's commercial success during the 1960s. The chapters on Stax crackle with excitement as they trace the seemingly accidental course of events that led to the development and eventual undoing of the Stax empire. Even forgetting the music, the history of Stax as a social document is no less fascinating. The book lets us watch as outside forces catalyze the inevitable end to the curious racial harmony that Stax maintained in the eye of a hurricane of racial tension.

Guralnick's fans will not be disappointed by **SWEET SOUL MUSIC**, and many new readers will doubtless be drawn into the fold. However, both the book and its approach have their limitations, and potential readers should be aware of them. This is not, nor was it intended to be, an exhaustive factual chronicle of Soul Music, including chart positions and matrix numbers. It does not attempt, for example, to be a companion piece to Arnold Shaw's **Honkers and Shouters**, which dealt with the vintage years of rhythm and blues. As a consequence, **SWEET SOUL MUSIC** will not be subject to the barrage of detailed criticism that Shaw's book lay victim to. Guralnick's book is a far more personal document and, as a consequence, much harder to fault.

What Guralnick has succeeded in doing, as he has before, is getting his informants to open up and shed light on previously opaque situations. Many of these individuals obviously relished the attention they were getting and revealed private feelings which are now placed into meaningful context. Guralnick has no doubt spared his sources considerable embarrassment and left much fascinating material on the cutting room floor. He has also dealt, as well as anyone might, with the inevitable lies, distortions and contradictions that emerge from interviewing so many people about distant events, in which egos are still vested.

Being a Soul Music fan and knowing about its principals will surely enhance the material in **SWEET SOUL MUSIC**, but it is by no means a prerequisite for enjoyment. Guralnick's style is such that the book is enjoyable strictly for its insights and character studies. Almost by default, this book is not a completist's paradise, but I doubt there will be a more honest or human document available about Soul Music.



ROOTS



Soul

REVUE

